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US & Israel bomb Iran as world watches

57 dead in Iran as school bombed; Defence Minister killed; Tehran strikes US' Middle East bases

WASHINGTON, TEL AVIV, TEHRAN/ 28 FEB

The United States and Israel launched major strikes on Iran on Saturday, opening a dramatic new chapter in regional tensions. President Donald Trump urged Iranians to "seize control of your destiny" and rise against the Islamic leadership that has ruled since 1979.

At least 57 people were reported killed at a girls' school in southern Iran, with dozens more wounded, according to state-run IRNA. The White House and the Israeli military did not immediately comment.

Israel has named its offensive "Operation Roar of the Lion",. The United States has called its strikes "Operation Epic Fury".

Trump announced the largest military intervention of his two terms in the Oval Office, saying that the US military has launched "major combat operations" in Iran.

People watch as smoke rises over the Tehran skyline after an explosion on Saturday; a fire reportedly breaks out in Dubai's Palm Jumeirah following Iran's missile attack —*PTI*

> **Our objective is to defend the American people by eliminating imminent threats from the Iranian regime. A vicious group of very hard, terrible people. Its menacing activities directly endanger the United States**
> -Donald Trump, US President

> **Together with the United States, we will strike hard at the terror regime and create conditions that will allow the brave Iranian people to cast off the yoke of this murderous regime**
> -Benjamin Netanyahu, Israeli PM

SENIOR IRANIAN FIGURES 'KILLED'

In a significant blow to Tehran, Iran's Defence Minister Amir Nasirzadeh and Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) commander Mohammed Pakpour are believed to have been killed in an Israeli strike, according to sources cited by Reuters. There was no immediate official confirmation from Tehran.

Nasirzadeh had previously served as Deputy Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces and began his career as a fighter pilot. Pakpour assumed command of the IRGC in 2025 after the death of his predecessor, Hossein Salami, in earlier Israeli strikes.

Iran's Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi alleged that Israeli strikes on a primary school for girls had killed dozens and vowed retaliation.

STRIKES NEAR KHAMENEI COMPOUND

Some of the first strikes appeared to hit areas around the offices of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in Tehran. Smoke rose over the capital as Iranian media reported attacks nationwide. Roads to Khamenei's compound were sealed.

It was unclear whether the 86-year-old leader was present during the strikes. Araghchi later told NBC News that Khamenei and President Masoud Pezeshkian were alive "as far as I know".

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the joint operation would allow "the brave Iranian people to take their fate into their own hands".

IRAN RETALIATES

Iran responded by firing missiles and drones at Israel and at US military bases across the region, including in Saudi Arabia, Abu Dhabi, Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain. Shrapnel from an Iranian missile strike on the UAE capital killed one person, state media said.

"The time has come to defend the homeland," Iran's Foreign Ministry declared on X.

POLITICAL FALLOUT

The strikes during Ramadan mark the second time in eight months that the US has used military force against Iran. Democrats criticised Trump for acting without congressional authorisation.

RISING TENSIONS

Tensions had escalated as US warships moved into the region. The immediate trigger appeared to be stalled nuclear talks. "They cannot have nuclear weapons," Trump said on Friday, expressing frustration over negotiations. Despite the targeting of senior figures, analysts caution that regime change is not guaranteed.—*PTI*

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B'deshi tourists to India fell by 9.4% amid tense ties

NEW DELHI, 28 FEB

Foreign Tourist Arrivals to India fell 9.4 per cent in 2025, with fewer visas issued between India and Bangladesh amid bilateral tensions. According to the Ministry of Tourism, arrivals from Bangladesh fell by 73.37 per cent in 2025 compared to the previous year. In 2025, Bangladeshi visitors dropped to 4,66,012, down from 17,50,165 in 2024. Bangladesh's ties with New Delhi have remained strained since former Bangladeshi prime minister Sheikh Hasina's Awami League regime was ousted in 2024. Excluding Bangladesh, foreign tourist arrivals to India rose 4.25 per cent in 2025. —*PTI*

Protests at KIA after flight fails to land in Nepal

NEW DELHI, 28 FEB

Passengers bound for Nepal have staged a protest against Air India Express at Kempegowda International Airport here, alleging mismanagement that disrupted their travel plans for two consecutive days. According to passengers, the flight departed Bengaluru for Kathmandu at 10.30am on 26 February. But, it returned without landing in Kathmandu under circumstances that were not clearly communicated. The same aircraft took off again on 27 February, but again failed to land and was diverted to Lucknow. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 2

AAIB blames low visibility for Ajit's plane crash

NEW DELHI, 28 FEB

The Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB) in its preliminary report on Saturday stated that the visibility at Baramati on 28 January, during the crash landing of VT-SSK aircraft carrying Maharashtra deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar, was below the required five kilometres. The crew reported visibility of 3,000 metres, and the tower confirmed this. The report recommends DGCA enforce procedures for flights at uncontrolled airfields and improve landing aids. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

India calls for de-escalation; cautions nationals in Iran

NEW DELHI, 28 FEB

As a joint attack by the US and Israel on Iran triggered a massive military confrontation in West Asia, India urged all sides on Saturday to exercise restraint and avoid escalation, asserting that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries must be respected.

India said that it is "deeply concerned" over the developments in Iran.

Separately, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar held phone conversations with Iranian Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi and his Israeli counterpart Gideon Sa'ar.

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, on a four-day visit to India, supported the United States' strikes on Iran, terming them an action to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon and threatening international peace and security.

Residents are evacuated from a building hit by a projectile in Haifa, northern Israel, Saturday, Feb. 28, 2026. No injuries were reported. —*PTI*

Meanwhile, the Indian Embassy in Tel Aviv on Saturday advised Indians to register with it immediately to facilitate swift assistance and to ensure the safety of Indians, after Israel launched a joint attack with the US against Iran.

Around 40,000 Indians live and work in Israel.

"Indians in Israel who have not registered with the Embassy are requested to do so using the link below: https://indembassyisrael.gov.in/indian_nationa," said a post by the mission on its official X handle.

Earlier on Saturday, the Indian Embassy advised its nationals in Israel to "exercise utmost caution" and "to avoid all unnecessary travel."

\"All Indians should remain in close proximity to designated shelters and familiarise themselves with the nearest protected spaces," it said.

"Indians are advised to avoid all non-essential travel within Israel. Indians must monitor local news, official announcements and emergency alerts," it added. —*PTI*

DGCA ADVISES AIRLINES TO AVOID 11 AIRSPACES AMID IRAN CONFLICT

Air India, IndiGo and other Indian carriers cancelled flights to the Middle East on Saturday after regional airspaces were abruptly shut following US and Israeli strikes on Iran. The aviation regulator, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), advised airlines to avoid the airspace of 11 countries — Iran, Israel, Lebanon, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait and Qatar — until 2 March.

Airlines including Air India, IndiGo, Air India Express, Akasa Air and SpiceJet suspended operations to the region. Flight tracking websites showed hundreds of aircraft hovering or diverting, with several services rerouted. Air India's Delhi–Tel Aviv flight returned to Mumbai mid-afternoon.

At Mumbai International Airport, 57 domestic and international flights were cancelled by 5.45 pm. Amritsar International Airport also warned passengers of disruptions. Civil Aviation Minister K. Rammohan Naidu reviewed preparedness with airlines and airport authorities amid mounting passenger disruption.

66 lakh names deleted in WB post-SIR

KOLKATA, 28 FEB

The Election Commission on Saturday published West Bengal's post-Special Summary Revision (SIR) electoral rolls, revealing that nearly 66 lakh names are likely to be deleted since the exercise began in November, while another 60 lakh have been kept 'under adjudication'. The phased publication marks the culmination of a 116-day statewide exercise that started on 4 November, with booth-level officers distributing enumeration forms.

The draft rolls, released on 16 December, had already pared down the electorate from 7.66 crore to 7.08 crore, removing over 58 lakh names due to death, migration, duplication or untraceability.

Of the 7.08 crore electors appearing in the draft rolls, around 6.4 crore have been marked as "approved" so far.

Nearly 8 lakh additional deletions followed scrutiny and hearings, bringing the SIR-linked omissions to around 66 lakh. The final figure could still change as fresh inclusions under Form 6 and objections under Form 7 are processed.

State-wise SIR deletion

Uttar Pradesh	2.89 crore*
Tamil Nadu	74 lakh
Gujarat	68.12 lakh
Bengal	66 lakh
Madhya Pradesh	34.25 lakh
Rajasthan	31.36 lakh
Chhattisgarh	24.99 lakh
Kerala	8.97 lakh
Assam	2.43 lakh
Goa	1.27 lakh
Puducherry	1.2 lakh
Andaman	5,269
Lakshadweep	206

*Draft voter roll

Around 60.06 lakh voters have been categorised as 'under adjudication', mainly over logical discrepancies, with judicial officers set to decide their fate in the coming weeks. The scale of deletions and pending cases has turned the SIR into a high-stakes political flashpoint ahead of April's assembly polls.

CM Mamata Banerjee alleged that authorities were "quietly" deleting more names, potentially touching 80 lakh, while TMC leader Tanmay Ghosh warned of political and legal agitations. BJP leader Jagannath Chattopadhyay said parties should contest based on the published rolls.

For TMC, urban turnout patterns in north Kolkata's 4 lakh-plus deletions are crucial, while the BJP eyes how it could reshape battleground districts. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

21 DEAD IN ANDHRA CRACKER UNIT EXPLOSION

VETLAPALEM, 28 FEB

At least 21 people were killed and eight others critically injured in a devastating explosion at a firecracker manufacturing unit in Kakinada district, Andhra Pradesh, on Saturday, officials said. The blast occurred around 2 pm at the unit, which reportedly housed approximately 30 workers, all from economically weaker sections of society.

Andhra Pradesh Minister Kandula Durgesh confirmed the fatalities and said the injured were undergoing treatment in nearby hospitals. "As far as I know, 21 bodies are seen at the site. There is no chance that anyone else would survive," he told reporters.

The Minister described the incident as the biggest blast in the state and added that officials are investigating the cause of the fire that triggered the explosion. "There was a lot of stock in the unit at the time. Even a minor accident can escalate due to the explosive nature of the materials," he said.

Rescue personnel and others at the site in Andhra Pradesh where 21 people were killed and 8 others critically injured on Saturday—*PTI*

Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu is expected to visit the site. Minister Durgesh said the Chief Minister would decide on support measures for the victims' families, but stressed: "We cannot bring back lives."

The tragedy has renewed calls for stricter safety oversight at small-scale firecracker units across the state. —*PTI*

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ANOTHER DRY SPELL

K'taka, other states to face heatwaves from March to May: IMD

NEW DELHI, 28 FEB

Above-normal heatwave days are expected between March and May, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said in its monthly forecast on Saturday. During March–May, likely heatwaves could strain health, water, power and essential services, especially for vulnerable groups, IMD chief Mrutyunjay Mohapatra said.

The regions affected include West Rajasthan, Gujarat, Haryana, Punjab, southern and eastern Maharashtra, eastern Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Gangetic West Bengal, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, and parts of north Karnataka and north Tamil Nadu. The IMD also warned that temperatures will rise in northwest and western India, reaching 3 to 5 degrees above normal for this time of year.

In March, maximum temperatures are likely to be normal to below normal across India, except in the northeast, east, Western Himalayas, and central and peninsular regions. Minimum temperatures are likely to remain normal across most parts of the country, except in some areas of northwest India, the southern peninsula, and along the east coast, where they are expected to be normal to below normal in March.s

While many parts of the country are expected to experience normal to above-normal rainfall in March, northeast India, and some parts of northwest and east-central India, might witness below normal rainfall.

The IMD reported February had India's lowest rainfall since 2001 and no cold waves, due to inactive western disturbances and weak easterly winds. February recorded the 10th highest maximum temperatures since 1901. —*PTI*

K'taka launches HPV vaccination drive for u-14 girls

BENGALURU, 28 FEB

The government has launched a Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination campaign to prevent cervical cancer, with a strong focus on the health of girls.

The campaign was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at an event in Ajmer in Rajasthan, and was simultaneously webcast at the KC General Hospital in Bengaluru.

Senior officials present at the Bengaluru event included Dr Sujatha Rathod, the Director of Medical Education; Avinash Menon, the Managing Director of the National Health Mission; the Dean of the Bangalore Medical College and Research Institute; the Director of Kidwai Hospital.

Approximately 1.15 crore girls above the age of 14 will be vaccinated through government health facilities. The campaign will run for three months and will be carried out on a mission-mode. The project may soon be expanded Statewide. — *Salar News*

Mysuru Zoo announces summer camp for youth

MYSURU, 28 FEB

Mysuru Zoo is organising a summer camp for students aged 12 to 18 years, with two sessions scheduled. The first batch runs from 13 to 22 April, and the second from 11 to 20 May. The camp aims to teach participants about captive wild animal management and wildlife conservation. Students will also learn about biodiversity, animal behaviour, and conservation efforts through both theoretical and practical classes. Zoo officials and experts will engage with students during the programme. Applications will be available at the Zoo office from 5 to 10 March, with submissions accepted until 12 March at 5pm. Only 60 students will be selected per batch on a first-come, first-served basis. For further details, visit www.mysuru.info. *—Salar News*

Solapur Railways adds 8-wheeler tower wagon

KALABURAGI, 28 FEB

The Solapur Division of Central Railway has added a new 8-wheeler Tower Wagon to strengthen its electrification infrastructure. Designed for enhanced stability, safety, and operational efficiency, the wagon improves maintenance of the Overhead Equipment (OHE). It will support the upgrade from 1x25 kV AC to 2x25 kV AC traction systems, vital for future traffic growth and energy efficiency. With this addition, the division now operates 11 tower wagons, boosting capabilities for OHE inspection and maintenance. Increased availability will enable more frequent inspections, minimising failures and improving reliability. The new wagon was inaugurated by the Additional Divisional Railway Manager in the presence of officials. This initiative reflects Indian Railways' commitment to modernisation, infrastructure upgrades, and future-ready train services. *—ANI*

CBI, IT and ED used like puppets: Kharge slams BJP

KALABURAGI, 28 FEB

IT/BT Minister Priyank Kharge accused the BJP on Saturday of weaponising federal agencies for political gain. The remarks came following the court's discharge of AAP leaders Arvind Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia and 21 others in the Delhi Excise policy case yesterday. Speaking to the media, Kharge alleged, "In the last 12 years, CBI, IT and ED have been used like puppets for the political benefit of BJP." The discharge of Arvind Kejriwal and the other accused in the excise policy case has triggered widespread legal and political debate across the country. Saying the prosecution failed to establish even prima facie suspicion, a Delhi Special Court discharged all 23 accused in the CBI's Delhi Excise Policy 2021–22 case. Special Judge (PC Act) Jitender Singh of the Rouse Avenue Court ruled that the prosecution's case was "legally unsustainable". *—ANI*

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Govt identifies 90 official spots to feed stray dogs

Feed dogs only at these spots, says Animal Husbandry Dept

BENGALURU, 28 FEB

The Animal Husbandry Department of the Bengaluru Central Municipal Corporation on Saturday designated 90 specific locations as official feeding zones for stray dogs within its jurisdiction. This initiative aims to balance animal welfare with public health and urban cleanliness across the central parts of the city.

The administration said that food should be provided to stray dogs only at officially identified feeding spots and must not be distributed on main roads or near hospitals, schools, or crowded areas.

"Signboards called feeding points have been installed at the identified places, and the public can feed them at the said places," Daljit Kumar, Additional Commissioner of Development, Central Municipal Corporation, said.

Kumar said that "providing food to community dogs/stray dogs in a systematic manner can reduce their aggressive nature and biting tendency by satisfying their hunger, which will be helpful in neutering stray dogs and conducting mass vaccination programs."

The feeding spots were identified in "priority places such as main roads, schools-colleges, hospitals, bus stands, metro stands and other public places where there is no inconvenience to the citizens walking and away from crowded areas" he said, adding that it was done as per the guidelines of the Supreme Court of India and the Animal Welfare Board of India.

The 90 places were identified across all the wards of the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA).

Additionally, removing, defacing, or destroying signs at official feeding spots is a punishable crime, and harming or harassing stray dogs remains a punishable offence.

On Friday, Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao said the State government aims to reduce rabies deaths to zero by 2030 and launched the State Action Plan for Dog-Mediated Rabies Elimination.

Anti-rabies vaccines and rabies immunoglobulin will be made available at all Primary Health Centres, Community Health Centres, taluk hospitals and district hospitals. *—Agencies*

5th State Finance Commission submits report to govt

The Fifth State Finance Commission, Karnataka, has submitted its report concerning City Corporations of the Greater Bengaluru Authority Area for the period 2026-2030 to the State government. The report was Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot and Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Thursday and to Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar on Friday. The submission was led by the Finance Commission Chairman C Narayanaswamy, along with members Mohamed Sanaulla, RS Phonde, and Secretary Vasireddi Vijaya Jyothsna.

Residents seek curbs on Nagamangala azan loudspeaker volume

MANDYA, 28 FEB

A group of residents in Nagamangala town has submitted a complaint to local police seeking regulation of loudspeaker sound levels at the Jamia Masjid.

Residents from Kumbara Street, Banajiga Street, Achar Street and Paduvallapatna Road said the volume has been disturbing nearby households, particularly children, senior citizens and those with health concerns. According to them, the Azan is broadcast four to five times daily, beginning around 5.30 am, affecting their routine activities. They clarified that they are not opposing the religious practice but have requested authorities to ensure the sound remains within permissible limits.

Nagamangala Tahsildar Adarsh told Salar News that a complaint had been received on Friday.

"A preliminary meeting has already been conducted with community leaders to ensure that the prescribed tolerance limits are followed. I have also instructed the Deputy Superintendent of Police to hold further discussions in this regard," he said.

He added that officials from the Pollution Control Department have been requested to measure the decibel levels emitted from the loudspeaker and submit a report.

Further action will follow based on findings and noise regulations. *—Salar News*

EXAMS BEGIN

PUC students make last-minute revisions before entering the examination hall for their board exams in Bengaluru on Saturday *–MOHAMMED ASAD*

Govt officials penalised over RTI delay

KOLAR/ KALABURAGI, 28 FEB

The Karnataka Information Commission has imposed fines totalling Rs 1.10 lakh in separate cases for failure to provide information under the RTI Act within the stipulated time.

At its Kalaburagi Bench, Information Commissioner B Venkat Singh levied a penalty of Rs 50,000 on five Gram Panchayat officials, directing them to pay Rs 10,000 each. The action followed a second appeal alleging delay in furnishing information. Those penalised include secretaries Yankanagouda (Tadabidi), Mallikarjun Nayak (Gundagurti), Ismail (Saidapur), and Development Officer Shivakumar Doddamani (Tadaru). In Ismail's case, Rs 10,000 each was imposed in two separate matters, totalling Rs 20,000.

The bench had earlier warned that non-compliance would attract penalties under Section 20(1) of the RTI Act.

In a separate order, the Commission fined Malur Tahasildar Roopa Rs 60,000 for ignoring requests from three applicants.

These applicants were seeking land records. Bench No 5, headed by Rajashekar S, directed that the amount be recovered from her salary after she failed to furnish documents and skipped multiple hearings. *—Salar News*

DGGI BUSTS RS 593 CR INVOICE FRAUD; MASTERMIND HELD

BENGALURU, 25 MAY

In a major crackdown on GST fraud, the Belagavi zonal unit of the Directorate General of GST Intelligence (DGGI) has unearthed a fake input tax credit racket worth approximately Rs 593 crore, officials said.

The action followed an investigation into a suspicious GST registration, which led to multiple searches on premises linked to Star Tax Consultant in Bengaluru, the DGGI said in a statement.

"The searches exposed a well-organised network engaged in issuing fake invoices without any actual supply of goods or services, enabling wrongful availment and passing on of input tax credit (ITC) amounting to nearly Rs 235 crore," the statement said.

Preliminary investigation revealed that numerous GST registrations were being operated by the accused solely for generating bogus invoices and e-way bills to facilitate fraudulent ITC claims by the ultimate beneficiaries.

The accused systematically used online accounting software to record and monitor transactions routed through several shell entities with no genuine business activity.

Mohammad Saifullah, a registered GST practitioner and the mastermind, was allegedly managing multiple non-existent and shell GSTINs and arranging for fake invoices and e-way bills in exchange for commission. *—PTI*

LEADERSHIP ROW

Shivakumar can become CM only if it's in his destiny: Suresh

BENGALURU, 28 FEB

Former Congress MP DK Suresh said his brother, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, could become Chief Minister "if it is in his destiny. If it is not, then nothing can be done."

Speaking to reporters in Bengaluru, Suresh downplayed speculation over leadership change and distanced himself from the ongoing discussions among legislators.

Some Congress MLAs, loyal to Shivakumar, on Friday night held a meeting in a hotel and reportedly discussed ways to see their leader rise to the post of the chief minister. They planned a visit to Delhi to urge the High Command to make Shivakumar the next chief minister.

"I have no information about that. You should ask the MLAs concerned," Suresh said. "That is their personal matter."

The power tussle flared up in the State since November 2025 when the Congress government crossed the halfway mark of two-and-a-half years, amid reports about an alleged power sharing agreement between Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar.

Meanwhile, Congress MLA K Harish Gowda urged the party leadership to consider first-time legislators for ministerial positions. *—PTI*

Dy CM DK Shivakumar and Education Minister Madhu Bangarappa at the Education Mega Conference and golden jubilee celebrations of the State Primary Teacher's Association in Bengaluru *–MOHAMMED ASAD*

Teachers must help eliminate caste, says Chief Minister

BENGALURU, 28 FEB

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Saturday said that only teachers have the power to transform individuals into extraordinary citizens, stressing the importance they play in ending caste.

Inaugurating State-level Educational Conference and Golden Jubilee celebrations of the Karnataka State Primary School Teachers' Association at Palace Grounds, he said teachers are the architects of the nation's future.

"At the time of Independence, the literacy rate was only 12 to 15 per cent. Today it has risen to 74 per cent. We must ask whether we are providing quality education that responds to social issues. This is not the fault of teachers. Because of the deeply rooted caste system, we have not been able to bring about the expected transformation in education," he said.

"Education must help eliminate (caste, superstition and regressive practices)," he said. "Only teachers can impart rational and scientific based education."

BOOST FOR INFRA

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, speaking at the conference, called upon teachers to prepare students not just to learn history but to create it. "You are not just nurturing children; you are nurturing society itself."

Announcing measures to strengthen rural education, he said Rs 8,000 crore to Rs 10,000 crore of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funds would be utilised to improve infrastructure in government schools in villages.

RECRUITMENT

Assuring that teachers' demands would be addressed in phases, Siddaramaiah said: "We will discuss the Old Pension Scheme in the Cabinet and arrive at a decision".

"Migration of children to cities for education must stop. Private schools have been advised to adopt government schools. Through this, we aim to fill 90,000 teaching posts," he said. *—PTI*

FOR SECOND TIME

Flyers protest in KIA as Nepal-bound flight returns

BENGALURU, 28 FEB

Passengers bound for Nepal have staged a protest against Air India Express at Kempegowda International Airport here, alleging mismanagement that disrupted their travel plans for two consecutive days.

According to passengers, the flight departed Bengaluru for Kathmandu at 10.30am on 26 February. However, the aircraft returned without landing in Kathmandu under circumstances that were not clearly communicated to them.

The same aircraft reportedly took off again on 27 February, but once again failed to land in Kathmandu and was diverted to Lucknow. Passengers alleged that they were made to remain seated inside the aircraft for several hours after landing in Lucknow.

Passengers then staged a protest inside the aircraft, forcing the airline to fly them back to Bengaluru.

Protesters claimed they were confined inside the aircraft for more than 30 hours in total and demanded compensation from the airline.

"Our entire Nepal trip has been ruined. We planned this well in advance and suffered financial losses," another passenger said.

Over 40 Kannada-speaking travellers were among those on board.

Airport staff tried to pacify the angry passengers,

Air India Express on Saturday announced Bengaluru-Kathmandu 'recovery flight' after the disruption.

The airline said that affected passengers have been provided hotel accommodation and were offered the option of complimentary rescheduling or full-refund cancellation. *—Agencies*

Mangaluru airport issues advisory amid US-Iran war

MANGALURU, 28 FEB

Amid escalating tensions in the Middle East and temporary closures across multiple international airspaces, the Mangaluru International Airport in Karnataka have issued a passenger advisory cautioning travellers about possible flight disruptions.

The alerts come as several international routes face delays or rerouting due to evolving geopolitical developments in the region.

In its advisory posted on X, the airport stated, "Due to temporary closures and restrictions affecting multiple international airspaces, certain international flights may experience delays or rerouting. Passengers are advised to check the latest flight status with their respective airlines before travelling to the airport and plan their journey accordingly."

The advisory was issued after reports of heightened military activity in the Middle East, particularly between Iran and Israel. According to the Iranian embassy in India, Iran launched a targeted missile strike against a United States military base in Bahrain. *—ANI*

2 Kerala CPI(M) workers held for threatening cops

T'PURAM, 28 FEB

Two workers of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)) have been taken into custody and a case registered against nine people for allegedly abusing and threatening police officers in Kerala. State Police Chief Ravada A Chandrasekhar said any attempt to undermine police morale would not be tolerated. Nagaroor police detained CPI(M) leaders Vishnu and Ratheesh for allegedly blocking a police vehicle and threatening officials after notices were served in connection with damage to flex boards of the Indian National Congress. The Kerala Police Officers' Association condemned the incident and sought strict action. Police have registered a case under relevant provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and the Kerala Police Act. *—PTI*

—ANI

Malankara church welcomes PM's unity stand

KOTTAYAM, 28 FEB

Baselios Mar Thoma Mathews III has welcomed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's reported view that the Malankara Church should remain united amid its long-running dispute with the Jacobite faction. His remarks follow Mr Modi's recent meeting in New Delhi with Ignatius Aphrem II, head of the Jacobite Syrian Church. Speaking at a memorial for Vattasseril Thirumeni in Kottayam, the Catholicos cited Supreme Court verdicts in 1958, 1995 and 2017 upholding church unity. The conflict between the Orthodox and Jacobite factions over control of churches in Kerala escalated after the 2017 ruling favouring the Orthodox side. The Jacobite Church said the Prime Minister expressed willingness to help resolve the dispute through dialogue. *—PTI*

Maharashtra to set up gig workers board: Minister

MUMBAI, 28 FEB

Akash Fundkar said the Centre's Social Security Code, in force since November 2025, formally recognises gig and platform workers as workers for the first time and provides for a National Social Security Board to safeguard their welfare. Speaking in the Assembly in response to questions from Hemant Ogle and Atul Bhatkhalkar, he said the board will extend healthcare, insurance and family welfare benefits, and states have been directed to implement the Code. In a separate reply, he said the state is coordinating with the National Textile Corporation to clear pending dues of workers from four shut Mumbai mills within a year, as directed by the Bombay High Court. *—PTI*

RaGa warns Punjab Congress over infighting

BARNALA, 28 FEB

Rahul Gandhi on Saturday warned Punjab Congress leaders that those who fail to act as team players would be side-lined, saying no individual is bigger than the party. Addressing the 'Kisan Mahachaupal' in Punjab's crucial Malwa belt ahead of the 2027 Assembly polls, the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha stressed that unity was essential to reclaim the state from the Aam Aadmi Party. He said party workers are supreme and decisions would be taken collectively. Mallikarjun Kharge and several senior state leaders attended the rally. The remarks come amid reported factionalism within the state unit, which the Congress high command recently warned against publicly airing. *—PTI*

2.71L voters deleted in WB district bordering B'desh

Analysts warn that minor changes in decisive seats can swing results

KOLKATA, 28 FEB

Election Commission's phased publication of post-Special Summary Revision (SIR) electoral rolls in West Bengal has revealed significant deletions across several districts, highlighting potential shifts ahead of the assembly elections due in April.

Nadia district, bordering Bangladesh, recorded around 2.71 lakh deletions since November. The electorate fell from 44.18 lakh at the start of the exercise to 41.45 lakh in the final roll, after the draft rolls had already reduced the figure to 42,02,261. Bankura also saw a net reduction of about 1.18 lakh names. Its voter count dropped from 30,33,830 initially to 29,01,009 in the draft rolls. After further scrutiny, around 4,000 more deletions were recorded, partially offset by fresh inclusions, leaving the final figure at 29.15 lakh.

Voters check their names in the list after the Election Commission published West Bengal's post-SIR electoral rolls, in Kolkata, on Saturday *—PTI*

North Kolkata, comprising seven TMC-held assembly constituencies, witnessed 4.07 lakh names omitted during SIR—3.9 lakh in the draft stage and 17,000 in the final list. The scale of fresh additions is yet to be officially confirmed. In Alipurduar, 1,02,835 deletions brought the final voter count to 11,96,651. Hooghly district also experienced significant churn: the electorate fell from 47,75,099 at the outset to 44,40,293, reflecting 3,34,806 deletions since November, while 1,73,064 voters remain under adjudication. Draft rolls had earlier recorded 44,56,224 voters.

Hard copies of the updated rolls have been displayed at SDO and BDO offices, with residents queuing to check whether their names are marked 'approved', 'deleted' or 'under consideration'. Soft copies are yet to appear on official EC portals or mobile applications.

Political analysts note that even minor swings in voter inclusion or deletion—2,000–3,000 in tightly contested constituencies — can be decisive. In 2021, several assembly seats were decided by margins of just a few thousand votes, with border dynamics, migration patterns, and demographic shifts influencing outcomes. Political parties have already intensified booth-level scrutiny, with cadres cross-checking printed lists and preparing appeals in anticipation of a closely fought election. *—PTI*

WB POLL DATES LIKELY IN MARCH

An official from the West Bengal CEO office indicated that election dates are likely to be announced in the second week of March, with voting possibly in three phases. The full Election Commission team will not visit on 1 March but may do so after Holi and Doljatra festivals. The EC has already visited Tamil Nadu and Assam but not West Bengal. The full bench might visit after finalising the voter list, with the schedule potentially announced by mid-March. *—PTI*

WB EC PORTAL FACES TECH GLITCH

Voters in West Bengal faced difficulties accessing their electoral status online as the Election Commission's portal was dormant on Saturday. The publication of post-SIR electoral rolls, which began on 4 November 2025, caused the issue. Both the EC's voter portal and the state CEO's website were unresponsive, and the ECINet app also failed to load. Voters reported problems checking their names. The technical glitch caused confusion during the roll publication process. *—PTI*

'CONG TRYING TO CREATE DRAMA'

Rajasthan Governor Haribhau Kisanrao Bagde, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and CM Bhajan Lal Sharma in Rajasthan *—PTI*

Defaming India: PM calls Cong 'Muslim League-Maoist'

JAIPUR, 28 FEB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday hit out against the Congress party over its youth wing's "shirtless protest" at the AI summit, saying the opposition party has become "Muslim League-Maoist Congress", that does not let go of any opportunity to malign the country.

The Muslim League's hatred towards India was the reason for the Partition and today, the Congress is acting in the same manner, Modi said at a rally at Kayad Vishram Sthal in Rajasthan's Ajmer.

He was in Ajmer to lay the foundation stones of and inaugurate various development works worth over Rs 16,600 crore.

When the world praises India, it fills Indians with pride. The Congress, however, attempts to insult the nation on global platforms, the prime minister said.

"When the world speaks well of India, every Indian feels proud. But the Congress tried to create drama and defame the country before foreign dignitaries," he said, referring to the "shirtless protest" by the Indian Youth Congress (IYC) at the recently concluded India AI Impact Summit in Delhi.

There was a time when INC stood for the Indian National Congress, he said.

History bears witness to the Muslim League's hatred towards India. It was the reason behind India's partition. Today, the Congress is doing the same, the Prime Minister said. *—PTI*

> **The (Indo-US) deal will destroy Indian farmers ... Our farmers are not mechanised. They have small land holdings ... Never ever has any prime minister, be it of the Congress or the BJP could open the agriculture sector**
>
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>
> -Rahul Gandhi, Congress leader

Shirtless stir: IYC Chief gets bail, Sessions Court stays it

NEW DELHI/JAMMU, 28 FEB

A Delhi court on Saturday issued a stay on the bail granted to Indian Youth Congress (IYC) President Uday Bhanu Chib in connection with a protest at the India AI Impact Summit here, hours after a magistrate court granted him relief saying the right to life and liberty is the "soul of the Indian Constitution".

Additional Sessions Judge Amit Bansal directed the stay after the Delhi Police challenged the bail order by Duty Magistrate Vanshika Mehta, and listed the matter on 6 March for further proceedings. Chib was produced before the magistrate at around 1am at her official residence after his four-day police custody, granted on 24 February following his arrest in connection with the 20 February 'shirtless protest', came to an end. The police sought a three-day extension of his custody, stating further interrogation was required to know whereabouts of two co-accused.

Dismissing the plea, the court said the right to life and liberty is the "soul of the Indian Constitution" and that to curtail liberty, a strong explanation or material evidence must be placed on record to show that denial of custody would impede course of justice.

14 people were arrested in connection with the protest. The protesters wore T-shirts bearing the images of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Donald Trump, with slogans against government and India-US trade deal.

Additionally, the father of Chib on Saturday thanked the judiciary for granting bail to his son, saying that faith in the justice delivery system had been upheld. *—PTI*

Himanta launches Assam BJP's 'Jan Ashirwad Yatra'

DHEKIAJULI, 28 FEB

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday launched the state BJP's 'Jan Ashirwad Yatra' from Dhekiajuli in Sonitpur district as the party seeks a third straight term in the Assembly polls.

He sought the support of the people to ensure that the BJP retains power and the journey of a developed and secure Assam continues to move forward.

Accompanied by state party president Dilip Saikia, Union Minister Pabitra Margherita and other top leaders, Sarma stood atop an open van leading the procession.

In his address before launching the Yatra, Sarma said, "It was in 2014 when you had reposed faith in Narendra Modi ji and elected him the prime minister. In 2016, you (public) instated the first BJP government in Assam, led by Sarbananda Sonowal. *—PTI*

Cong, Left flag Modi's Israel visit as 'ill-timed'

NEW DELHI, 28 FEB

The Congress on Saturday termed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Israel "shameful" and "ill-timed," saying it creates the perception of a political endorsement of military escalation which is deeply antithetical to India's historic commitment to a rules-based international order.

In a statement, Salman Khurshid, Chairman of the Congress Foreign Affairs Department, said the Congress is "deeply concerned" at Modi's visit to Israel from 25 to 26 February at a moment of heightened tensions, a breakout of hostilities and the palpable risk of wider conflict and the palpable risk of wider conflict in West Asia. Congress General Secretary, communications, Jairam Ramesh, also said that two days after Modi "celebrated his visit to Israel", Israel and the US began their joint assault on Iran.

Meanwhile, Left parties on Saturday said the attack on Iran followed immediately after Prime Minister Narendra Modi concluded his visit to Israel, and urged the government of India to condemn the military action. *—PTI*

J'KHAND CIVIC POLLS: BJP-NOMINEES WIN IN RANCHI, MEDININAGAR

RANCHI, 28 FEB

BJP-backed **Roshni Khalkho** on Friday won the mayoral post of Ranchi Municipal Corporation, while Congress-supported Sudha Gupta was elected mayor of the Mango Municipal Corporation in Jamshedpur.

Khalkho defeated her nearest Congress-backed rival Rama Khalkho by 14,363 votes. She secured 1,57,669 votes against Rama's 1,43,306 in the contest, an official said.

A total of 11 candidates were in the fray for the mayor's post.

In Mango Municipal Corporation, Congress-supported Sudha Gupta, wife of former Jharkhand health minister Banna Gupta, defeated BJP-backed Sandhya Singh by 18,602 votes. In Hazaribag Municipal Corporation, journalist Arvind Rana won the mayoral post by defeating his nearest Congress's rival Sarfaraz by 4,657 votes. In Medininagar in Palamu district, BJP-backed Aruna Shankar won mayoral contest by defeating Congress's Namrata Tripathi by 3,122 votes. *—PTI*

Cong hopeful as it begins seat sharing talks with DMK in TN

CHENNAI, 28 FEB

The seat-sharing talks with the ruling DMK have been "friendly and cordial" and the Congress is hopeful that its demands will be fulfilled, the AICC in-charge for Tamil Nadu, Girish Chodankar, said on Saturday.

On whether the discussions revolved around power-sharing and the number of seats, he told reporters, "Both of us exchanged each other's concerns freely. They offered a RS seat." On whether the Congress was also in touch with TVK, he shot back "we are in DMK headquarters."

MODI VISIT

Prime Minister Modi will arrive in Chennai on Saturday night for his one-day visit to Tamil Nadu and Puducherry on 1 March. *—PTI*

TN HAS 1.18 CR YOUNG VOTERS: ECI

Tamil Nadu has around 1.18 crore young voters, with 3,060 assistant electoral registration officers deployed to register youth, according to the Election Commission. The final electoral roll shows 12,51,742 first-time voters aged 18-19 and 1,05,31,653 in the 20-29 age group. The ECI's review on 26-27 February revealed targeted campaigns in colleges. The electoral roll has 5,67,07,380 voters, with 75,032 polling stations planned, and measures for inclusivity and transparency including web-casting and VVPATs. *—PTI*

Sibal accuses BJP of weaponising law against Opposition

NEW DELHI, 28 FEB

A day after former Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal was discharged in the liquor policy case, Rajya Sabha MP **Kapil Sibal** on Saturday accused the BJP of "weaponising" the law to target opposition leaders.

He urged the Supreme Court to direct the government to amend laws for ensuring that arrests are made only after a magistrate is shown evidence.

Sibal also accused the government of following the colonial mindset of arresting first and gathering evidence later.

His remarks came after a Delhi court discharged Kejriwal, his former deputy Manish Sisodia and 21 others in the liquor policy case.

Giving examples of Lalu Prasad, Ashok Gehlot, Sachin Pilot, Farooq and Omar Abdullah and then Mehbooba Mufti, Sibal claimed that only opposition politicians were being targeted.

Meanwhile, Aam Aadmi Party convenor Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday visited the Hanuman Mandir, a day after the Delhi court discharged him in the excise policy case.

In Mumbai, the Shiv Sena (UBT) said on Saturday that AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal's discharge in the excise policy case was a "slap" on political vendetta. *—PTI*

Give one RS seat as promised: HAM to BJP

GAYAJI/BHUBANESWAR/ PATNA, 28 FEB

In a fresh outburst, Union Minister Jitan Ram Manjhi on Saturday said that his party Hindustani Awam Morcha (HAM) should be given a Rajya Sabha seat in Bihar for which elections would be held on 16 March .

He claimed that HAM, a constituent of NDA, had been promised one Rajya Sabha seat by BJP ahead of 2024 Lok Sabha polls. Odisha Congress Committee President Bhakta Charan Das said, "We need to stop horse trading in politics. There should be no horse trading in the Rajya Sabha polls." Janshakti Janta Dal Chief Tej Pratap Yadav, said his party would contest the upcoming polls. *—PTI*

AMID CONCERNS OVER VSR CRASH

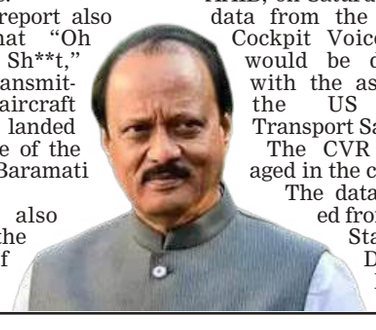
AAIB flags low visibility, poor runway upkeep in Ajit Pawar's plane crash

NEW DELHI/MUMBAI, 28 FEB

The Aircraft Accident Probe Agency (AAIB) on Saturday released the preliminary report on the plane crash that killed Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister **Ajit Pawar** and four others at Baramati on 28 January and said the visibility at the time of the crash was below the required level.

The AAIB flagged about fading marks on the runway and the presence of loose gravel on the runway surface at Baramati, as it recommended the regulator, DGCA to ensure that stakeholders maintain safety standards at uncontrolled airfields.

The 22-page report also mentioned that "Oh Sh**t... Oh Sh**t," words were transmitted from the aircraft before it crash landed on the left side of the runway at the Baramati airport.



The report also comes against the backdrop of concerns being raised about the crash of the VSR Ventures-owned Learjet 45 aircraft (VT-SSK) on 28 January.

AAIB, on Saturday, said the data from the Solid-State Cockpit Voice Recorder would be downloaded with the assistance of the US National Transport Safety Board.

The CVR was damaged in the crash.

The data downloaded from the Solid-State Flight Data Recorder is being analysed, the report said. On the day of the accident, AAIB said the tower was manned by a ground instructor of one of the Flying Training Organisation who was communicating with the aircraft to assist the landing.

Meanwhile, the responsibility of replying to issues related to the Excise, Sports and Minority Affairs portfolios held by Maharashtra Deputy CM Sunetra Pawar has been entrusted to senior NCP ministers during the ongoing budget session of the state legislature. *—PTI*

— PTI

Kerala doctors decide to intensify stir

T'PURAM, 28 FEB

Kerala government doctors announced plans to march to the DME office on Monday, protesting against authorities' efforts to suppress their indefinite strike. The Kerala Government Medical College Teachers' Association (KGMCTA) stated that it would intensify its strike over unresolved issues related to service conditions and pay anomalies. They alleged pressure being exerted on staff to curb the agitation, and said doctors would relinquish extra administrative duties, submitting a list of roles to the DME. The strike has entered its 33rd day, affecting outpatient, inpatient services and surgeries, with the association criticising the government's reluctance to resolve the demands. —*PTI*

Blast exposes unsafe Andhra cracker units

Heavy explosion threw bodies into nearby paddy fields

VETLAPALEM, 28 FEB

The devastating explosion at a firecracker manufacturing unit in Vetlapalem village in the Samarlakota mandal of Andhra's Kakinada district on Saturday has once again highlighted the dangerous conditions under which many such units operate.

Authorities said the blast exposed lax safety norms, particularly in smaller, poorly regulated factories that often employ local labour without adequate protective measures. An official investigation has been launched to determine whether safety protocols were followed and if the unit held valid licences.

The intensity of the explosion was so strong that bodies were reportedly flung into nearby paddy fields, with locals seen shifting the victims in makeshift sheets made from fertiliser bags.

Fire and smoke continued to emanate from the site, while ambulances rushed the injured to hospitals. The Kakinada Government General Hospital received seven patients with burns ranging from 90 to 100 per cent, all of whom remain under treatment.

Dense black smoke rises from the firecracker manufacturing unit in Andhra Pradesh's Vetlapalem village on Saturday after the explosion —*PTI*

Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed graet sorrow over the tragedy on social media platform X.

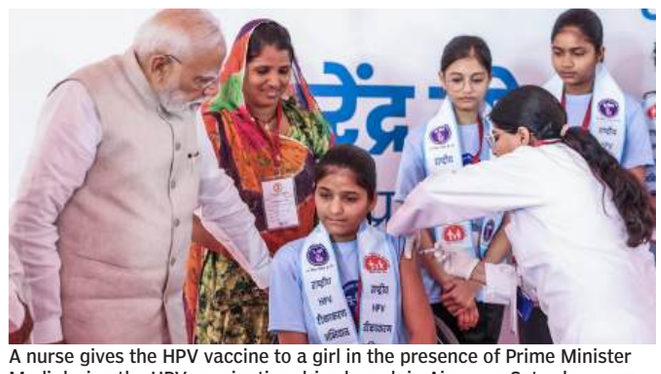
He announced Rs 2 lakh ex-gratia from the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund (PMNRF) for the next of kin of each of the deceased, and Rs 50,000 for the injured.

"May the injured recover soon," he said. Union Home Minister Amit Shah also condoled the deaths.

The police have deployed drones to locate the body parts flung into surrounding paddy fields.

Senior officials and state ministers have been directed to visit the accident site to oversee relief measures.

The tragedy has drawn renewed attention to the precarious working conditions in firecracker units across Andhra Pradesh and the urgent need for stricter enforcement of safety norms. Experts warn that, without proper regulation, even minor accidents can escalate catastrophically due to the highly explosive nature of the stockpiled materials. — *PTI*



A nurse gives the HPV vaccine to a girl in the presence of Prime Minister Modi during the HPV vaccination drive launch in Ajmer on Saturday —*ANI*

PM kicks off HPV vaccination drive

JAIPUR, 28 FEB

Prime Minister Modi launched a nationwide Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination drive for 14-year-old girls from Ajmer in Rajasthan.

The campaign against cervical cancer was formally inaugurated at a programme held in Ajmer, on Saturday, where several girls were administered the vaccine. The PM also interacted with the beneficiaries on the occasion.

Officials said a single-dose 'Gardasil 4' vaccine, a quadrivalent HPV vaccine, will be used in the campaign. The injection provides protection against HPV types 16 and 18, responsible for cervical cancer, as well as types 6 and 11.

The Union Health Ministry, in an official communication sent to all states on 25 February, stated, "All 14-year-old girls across the country will be administered a single dose of the 'Gardasil 4' vaccine at government health facilities, including Ayushman Arogya Mandirs (Primary Health Centres), Community Health Centres, sub-district and district hospitals, and government medical colleges and hospitals." — *PTI*

M'rashtra to airlift tankers stalled on Mumbai-Pune road

MUMBAI, 28 FEB

Following a gas tanker accident on the Mumbai-Pune Expressway that caused a 36-hour traffic jam, Maharashtra is exploring the option of flying out damaged tankers in extreme emergencies. The government has ordered the creation of SOPs, hazardous material response units on highways, and enhanced fire-fighting systems. Transport Minister Pratap Sarnaik said the tanker was licensed and inspected regularly, but the accident underscored the need for better preparedness. Chief Minister Fadnavis said the government is examining airlifting damaged vehicles, as done in some countries, and will improve traffic systems. Over Rs 5 crore via Fastag will be reimbursed to affected vehicle owners. —*PTI*

— PTI

UP ex-Muslim YouTuber stabbed, seven men booked

GHAZIABAD, 28 FEB

A 50-year-old YouTuber known for his videos about a particular religion was stabbed by two bikers wearing helmets here, leaving him seriously injured. Chief Minister Adityanath called for strict action. The police said they have formed 10 teams to nab the suspects. Salim Ahmed, alias Salim Wastik, was attacked in his office. e sustained serious injuries on his neck and abdomen. He was later referred to Delhi Guru Teg Bahadur Hospital. Ahmed runs the YouTube channel 'Salim Wastik' and goes by the title 'Ex-Muslim.' An FIR has been lodged against seven individuals as per his son Usman's complaint. —*PTI*

MARRIAGE TO NON-MIZO MEN

CM defends law denying ST tag to Mizo women

AIZAWL, 28 FEB

Defending the law that strips Mizo women of their Mizo identity and ST tag if they marry non-Mizo men, Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma said the recent amendments to the Mizo marriage and property inheritance law were not a unilateral government initiative, but is based on consensus among key stakeholders.

The Mizo Marriage and Inheritance of Property (Amendment) Bill, introduced by Lalduhoma, who also holds the Law portfolio, was passed by the Assembly this month.

The new legislation codifies customary law and strengthens the principal Act of 2014, introducing changes relating to polygamy, inter-community marriage and women's property rights.

While the Bill introduces a landmark ban on polygamy and grants women rights to 50 per cent of matrimonial property, it has sparked intense debate over an interpretation of a clause by the chief minister that potentially strips Mizo women of their Mizo identity and ST status if they marry non-Mizo men.

Mizoram's largest women's organisation, the Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl (MHIP), on Friday urged the state government to withdraw the Bill, calling it potentially "unsafe" for Mizo women.

Responding to the criticism, Lalduhoma said the Bill was based on the recommendations of the Mizo Customary Law Review Committee, which comprises representatives of 10 organisations, including MHIP, the Central Young Mizo Association (CYMA), and experts from Mizoram University and the state law college.

The CM said the earlier Mizo Marriage, Divorce and Inheritance of Property Act, 2014, provided that if a Mizo woman married a person from another community, she was deemed to have "entered" her husband's family. — *PTI*

9 Botswana cheetahs arrive at MP's Kuno National Park

SHEOPUR, 28 FEB

Nine cheetahs flown from Botswana arrived at the Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh on Saturday and were released into an enclosure, boosting India's big cat count under the reintroduction programme to 48.

Union Forest Minister Bhupender Yadav released six female and three male cheetahs into the enclosure for quarantine, Madhya Pradesh Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) L Krishnamoorthy said.

The third batch of cheetahs from Africa arrived earlier in the day on an IAF aircraft as part of a four-year cheetah population revival plan, officials said.

Speaking to reporters, district PRO Avantika Shrivastava said the animals were flown from Botswana to Gwalior on an IAF aircraft and were later transported to Kuno in IAF helicopters.

The IAF has been assisting the cheetah revival programme and had earlier transported the animals from Namibia in September 2022 and from South Africa in February 2023, said Project Cheetah Director Uttam Sharma.

Cheetah Gamini feeds its cubs at the Kuno National Park in MP's Sheopur district. The number of cheetahs now in India is 39 —*PTI*

Three cheetahs have been relocated to Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary, while 36 remain at Kuno, Sharma said.

Officials said the endangered animals are generally not kept in a single habitat due to the risk of disease outbreaks that could wipe out an entire population.

The cheetah, the world's fastest land animal, became extinct in India nearly seven decades ago.

Last year, 12 cubs were born at Kuno, but six, including three cubs, did not survive. This year, nine cubs were born in two litters between 7 February and 18 February. In all, 39 cubs have been born at Kuno since 2023, of which 27 survived. — *PTI*

The victim (left) and the suspect, Munchun Kewat —*ANI*

Delhi man held for killing pregnant wife, 3 kids

NEW DELHI, 28 FEB

A man accused of murdering his wife and three minor children in north-west Delhi has been arrested, police said.

The suspect, identified as Munchun Kewat, allegedly killed his family at their home in the Samaypur Badli area on Wednesday before fleeing the city.

According to a senior Delhi Police officer, nearly 15 teams were formed to track him down. Using technical surveillance and local intelligence inputs, officers traced his movements to Kishangarh in Rajasthan, where he was apprehended.

He was subsequently brought back to Delhi for further interrogation. Police are investigating the motive behind the alleged killings and examining all possible angles as part of the probe. — *PTI*

'Review British-era Coast Guard rules'

NEW DELHI, 28 FEB

The Supreme Court has asked the Centre not to remain stuck with British-era criteria on retirement age and service conditions of armed forces personnel, and to consider constituting an expert committee to review the parameters of coast guards.

Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi stayed an order of the Delhi High Court, which held that the Indian Coast Guard must have a uniform retirement age of 60 for all ranks.

The bench was hearing the Centre's appeal against the Delhi HC's order last year quashing Rule 20(1) and Rule 20(2) of Coast Guard (General) Rules, 1986, which provided that officers of the rank of commandant and below would retire at the age of 57, while those above that would retire at 60.

The court observed that experience mattered greatly in such a force, and the government should not be "too static" in its approach to service conditions. Dave contended that the HC erred in comparing coastguards, which comes under the defence ministry, to forces like the ITBP, the CRPF, the CISF, and the SSB. —*PTI*

Patiala Law University drops Rajiv Gandhi's name

PATIALA, 28 FEB

The academic council of the Rajiv Gandhi National University of Law (RGNUL) has approved a proposal to rename the institution as National Law University, sparking a controversy.

The Vice-Chancellor, Prof Jaishankar Singh, said the proposal has been forwarded to the executive council for action. If approved, it will be sent to the Punjab Higher Education Department. An amendment to the Rajiv Gandhi National University of Law, Punjab Act, 2006, will be required to formalise the change.

Patiala MP Dharamvira Gandhi criticised the move, describing it as a "deliberate attempt to polarise voters ahead of the Punjab Assembly elections." — *PTI*

Kerala HC issues notices over pineapple farming

KOCHI, 28 FEB

The Kerala High Court has sought responses from the Centre and the state government on a PIL seeking an immediate halt to pineapple cultivation at Athirappilly and Kallal estates due to ecological concerns.

Chief Justice Soumen Sen observed the land has the potential for human-animal conflict and directed the Plantation Corporation of Kerala to consider objections.

The plea, filed by activist Angels Nair, said that pesticide use and an expired lease are threatening the Chalakudy River and its biodiversity. —*PTI*

HC defers Delhi admin's order on school fee panels

NEW DELHI, 28 FEB

The Delhi High Court on Saturday deferred the implementation of the city government's mandate to private schools to constitute school-level fee-regulation committees (SLFRCs) for the next academic session.

Chief Justice DK Upadhyaya and Justice Tejas Karia said during the pendency of the petitions challenging the government decision, the constitution of the SLFRCs shall remain in abeyance and the schools shall collect the same fees for the academic year 2026-2027 as they did in the year. The bench passed the order on pleas moved by several school associations seeking a stay on a 1 February notification of the Delhi government that asked the schools to set up SLFRCs within 10 days. The petitioners are the Delhi Public School Society, Action Committee Unaided Recognised Private Schools, The Forum of Minority Schools, Forum for Promotion of Quality Education for All, Rohini Educational Society and the Association of Public Schools.

The court said the fees for the next session are unlikely to be fixed for each of the schools before 1 April.

It added that the Delhi School Education (Transparency in Fixation and Regulation of Fees) Act provides that the schools can collect the fee of the previous academic year until the fee is fixed. —*PTI*

THE REAL KERALA STORY

Kerala Imam urges mosques to welcome Hindu devotees

T,PURAM, 28 FEB

The appeal of Palayam Imam VP Suhaib Maulavi to open mosques and Muslim houses to Hindu devotees during the Attukal Pongala festival day here has gone viral on social media platforms, with many netizens describing it as an example of the real Kerala story. Attukal Pongala, which falls on 3 March, is considered one of the largest gatherings of women in the world.

Maulavi, during his Friday sermon, urged Muslims to extend hospitality to Hindu devotees arriving in the city for the Pongala. He said that although Attukal Pongala is associated with a different faith and Muslims do not take part in its rituals, the occasion presents an opportunity to serve as gracious hosts to the thousands of women and children who visit Thiruvananthapuram.

Imam Suhaib Maulavi (left) and devotees cooking the Pongala offering—*ANI*

"Like last year, Pongala is being observed during Ramadan. We must share the spirit of joy, fraternity and love that defines Ramadan with our sisters and their children who come here for Pongala," he said.

Maulavi called upon the community to arrange drinking water and Ramadan food items for the devotees and to ensure facilities for their rest. He stressed that Islamophobia and the world can be countered only through love.

The Muslim cleric's speech soon went viral on social media platforms. — *PTI*

Temple hosts Iftar in Kerala's Kasaragod

KASARAGOD, 28 FEB

A centuries-old Hindu shrine here has hosted a community Iftar for Muslims, as a mark of religious harmony.

The Sree Poobanam Kuzhi Temple at Thachangad here hosted the Iftar in its courtyard on Thursday as part of "Brahmakalashotsavam" festival which marked the re-consecration of its deities. In the visuals on social media platforms and TV channels, it could be seen that a large number of Muslim men, wearing the traditional white cap, are sitting on neatly arranged tables in the decorated temple courtyard and enjoying their iftar feast.

They broke their fast with dates and other delicacies.

Temple sources said the iftar was organised as local Muslims could not take part in the recent "annadanam" (community feast) organised by the shrine management due to Ramadan fasting.

"This shrine and its festivals here are part of our life. We used to gather on its premises every day after school during our childhood. The festivities here are not new to us," a Muslim told the media after taking part in the iftar. — *PTI*

'The Kerala Story 2' fails to click

T'PURAM/KOCHI/ KOZHIKODE, 28 FEB

A day after the Kerala High Court paved the way for the release of the 'The Kerala Story 2–Goes Beyond' film, ticket sales of the movie are slow, but is expected to pick up, theatre owners said on Saturday.

Meanwhile, DYFI activists staged protests outside theatres screening the film in various parts of the state, saying that they will not allow people to watch the movie, which allegedly depicts Kerala in a bad light.

At the PVR theatre at the Lulu Mall in Thiruvananthapuram, there were only 68 bookings till 10 am for four shows.

In Kochi, Suresh, the owner of the Shenoy theatre, said there were around 50 per cent bookings for the day's four shows. — *PTI*

ROBOT REVOLUTION

Shoppers watch humanoid robots serving ice cream and coffee at a Beijing mall, with the ice cream robot completing orders in about 30 seconds. While high-end models cost up to $2,50,000, some retail robots are now available for under $10,000. Recently, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz toured Unitree Robotics in Hangzhou, China, where AI-powered humanoid robots performed a human-like 'Kung Fu' demonstration. The robots also showcased boxing, dancing, and flexing routines —*PTI*

World leaders fear broader escalation in Middle East

People in a shelter following alarms for incoming missile from Tehran after The US and Israel launched an attack on Iran in Tel Aviv, Israel, on Saturday —*PTI*

European leaders held emergency security meetings and scrambled to protect their citizens in the Middle East after US and Israeli strikes on Iran on Saturday that triggered global concerns of escalation into a broader conflict.

French President Emmanuel Macron called for an emergency UN Security Council meeting in response to the US and Israeli strikes in Iran. Germany and the UK are holding their own emergency meetings on Saturday to discuss the situation. The European Union is evacuating some staff from the region, and European leaders are planning to coordinate further responses.

The responses come after the US and Israel launched a major attack on targets across Iran, and US President Donald Trump called on the Iranian people to "take over your government" — an extraordinary appeal that suggested they could be seeking to end the country's theocracy after decades of tensions.

The strikes by the US create a dilemma for its democratic allies. While European leaders firmly oppose Iran's nuclear programme and crackdowns by its hard-line theocracy, they are loath to embrace unilateral military action by Trump that could breach international law and unleash a broader conflict.

Trump's strikes on Iran last June and the arrest of Venezuela's Nicolas Maduro last month caused a similar quandary.

It was unclear whether US allies were given any advance warning of the attacks. The German government said it was only given notice Saturday morning. France's junior defence minister said France knew something would happen, but didn't know when.

"The escalation underway is dangerous for everyone. Must it stop? Macron said in a statement. France, which has military presence in the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Jordan, would offer military aid to its partners in the Middle East, the president said.

"The outbreak of war among the United States, Israel and Iran has serious consequences for peace and international security,? Macron said.

He called on Iran's leadership to commit to negotiations on its nuclear and ballistic programmes.

"The Iranian people should also be able to build their future freely. The massacres perpetrated by the Islamic regime disqualify it, and necessitate that the people be given a voice."

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer chaired a meeting of the government's emergency committee on Saturday morning.

"We do not want to see further escalation into a wider regional conflict," a UK government spokesperson said, reiterating Britain's support for a negotiated solution to Iran's nuclear ambitions. Britain was not involved in the strikes.

The German government's crisis management team was also due to meet.

CONCERN ABOUT "NEW, EXTENSIVE" WAR

Responding to the attack, the European Union's top diplomat called the conflict in the Middle East "perilous" and said she was working with Israeli and Arab officials to pursue a negotiated peace.

"Iran's regime has killed thousands. Its ballistic missile and nuclear programmes, along with support for terror groups, pose a serious threat to global security," said Kaja Kallas, foreign policy chief of the 27-nation bloc, in a post on social media.

Norwegian Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide told Norwegian broadcaster NRK that he was concerned the failure of negotiations between the US and Iran meant a "new, extensive war in the Middle East" would happen.

Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez said Madrid rejected "the unilateral military action by the United States and Israel, which represents an escalation and contributes to a more uncertain and hostile international order." He said Spain "likewise" rejected the actions of the Iranian regime.

European Union leaders issued a joint statement Saturday calling for restraint and engaging in regional diplomacy in hopes of "ensuring nuclear safety."

"We call on all parties to exercise maximum restraint, to protect civilians, and to fully respect international law," said European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President António Costa.

'IRRESPONSIBLE'

The Nobel Peace Prize-winning International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons condemned the US and Israeli strikes on Iran in harsher words.

"These attacks are totally irresponsible and risk provoking further escalation as well as increasing the danger of nuclear proliferation and the use of nuclear weapons," said its executive director, Melissa Parke.

Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim condemned Israeli strikes on Iran and accompanying US military action, warning that the escalating conflict has pushed the Middle East to the "edge of catastrophe."

Russia's Foreign Ministry called the strikes "a pre-planned and unprovoked act of armed aggression against a sovereign and independent UN member state," demanding an immediate halt to the military campaign and a return to diplomacy.

The ministry accused Washington and Tel Aviv of "hiding behind" concerns about Iran's nuclear programme while actually pursuing regime change. —*PTI*

SALAR

Graft in judiciary row: How are NCERT books prepared?

Officials pointed out that the previous Class 8 Social Science textbook, used until 2024, did not mention corruption —*PTI*

India's school textbooks are not written by a single author or cleared at the whim of an individual official. According to the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), each book is the product of a layered, consultative and academically rigorous process involving multiple committees and expert reviews.

The preparation begins with the constitution of a Curricular Area Group (CAG) for each subject. The CAG identifies and selects experts best suited to draft content for a particular class and discipline. Officials say the group assesses academic credentials, field experience and subject expertise to ensure the material is age-appropriate and aligned with national curricular goals.

The CAG then sets up a Textbook Development Committee (TDC) for the subject concerned. These committees comprise academicians, pedagogy specialists, curriculum developers, subject experts and, in some cases, industry professionals. The aim is to combine scholarly depth with practical insight into knowledge requirements in specific fields.

Draft chapters prepared by the TDC do not move directly to publication. Instead, they pass through a multi-level internal review and consultation process. NCERT describes this as academically rigorous and consultative, designed to ensure factual correctness, conceptual clarity and pedagogical soundness.

Once this internal scrutiny is complete, the full CAG reviews the draft. It is then placed before the National Syllabus and Teaching-Learning Material Committee (NSTC), which grants the final go-ahead. At this stage, emphasis is placed on verifying accuracy, maintaining balance and ensuring that content is appropriate for the age group concerned.

Industry experts may be consulted as part of the TDC to assess the relevance of knowledge requirements in particular areas. Government officials or authorities are sometimes approached for input on specific sections if deemed necessary. However, officials stress that such consultation is not mandatory, nor is there a compulsory rule requiring independent vetting by particular professional bodies.

Feedback mechanisms are also built into the system. When substantial suggestions or concerns are received about textbook content, NCERT constitutes review committees to examine the material. Officials maintain that textbooks are not static documents but are subject to periodic scrutiny and revision.

This process has come under intense scrutiny following controversy over a Class 8 Social Science textbook that included references to corruption within the judiciary. The Supreme Court has since imposed what it described as a "complete blanket ban" on the book, calling certain portions "offending".

The chapter in question, titled "The Role of the Judiciary in Our Society", formed part of the second volume of the Class 8 Social Science textbook. It discussed challenges faced by the judiciary, including corruption and the pendency of cases.

Officials clarified that the book was prepared by a panel of subject experts that included a lawyer. However, they acknowledged that there was no independent review of the chapter by members of the legal fraternity. "There was a lawyer among the members who wrote that particular chapter. There was no one from the legal fraternity to review the book," an official said.

Responding to criticism that a chapter concerning the judiciary should have been vetted separately by legal professionals, officials reiterated that there is no compulsory provision mandating such independent examination. They maintained that the standard textbook development process was followed.

The contentious section explained that the government performs three primary roles: protector (law and defence), provider (welfare and infrastructure), and regulator (economic activity and social justice), through mechanisms such as the Constitution, laws, elected representatives, the bureaucracy and the judiciary. It then posed a question to students: if these institutions are meant to serve citizens, why do we still hear of cases of bribery and corruption in public office?

The chapter also outlined grievance redressal mechanisms, noting that government departments have grievance offices and vigilance commissions where complaints, including those related to corruption, can be lodged.

Officials pointed out that the previous Class 8 Social Science textbook, used until 2024, did not mention corruption. However, corruption features in both the new Class 7 and Class 8 textbooks, each divided into two parts.

The Class 7 book refers to corruption in the legislature and during elections, but does not mention the judiciary. It notes that members found to have indulged in corruption would be removed and that vigilance commissions exist to investigate such matters.

It also addresses broader democratic challenges, including wealth disparity, excessive control by a few over democratic institutions, erosion of judicial independence and manipulation of information channels, asking students how individuals and society can remain vigilant.

The first part of the new Class 8 book similarly discusses political corruption. One cartoon depicts bundles of Rs 500 notes discovered in a candidate's car during election inspections. The text observes that while India's electoral system is celebrated as the world's largest democratic exercise, it faces challenges such as the growing influence of money in elections, candidates with criminal records and urban voter apathy. —*PTI*

LETTERS

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Media cannot perform its role under fear or influence: SC Judge

Supreme Court judge Justice **BV Nagarathna** on Friday warned that the gravest threats to press freedom do not arise from overt censorship but from subtle economic and regulatory pressures that shape editorial choices long before a story goes to print.

Speaking at the presentation of the IPI India Award for Excellence in Journalism 2025, Justice Nagarathna said the media cannot perform its democratic role under constraint, fear or influence. The recent trend of attempts to "capture the press", she observed, has both economic underpinnings and political overtones.

"A press outlet may be legally free to criticise the government, yet economically constrained in ways that make such criticism costly or unsustainable," she said.

Justice Nagarathna, currently the lone woman judge on the apex court bench and set to become India's first woman Chief Justice in September 2027, underscored the unique constitutional position of press freedom in India. Unlike some jurisdictions where press freedom is separately enumerated, in India it flows from the interaction of two fundamental rights: Article 19(1)(a), which guarantees freedom of speech and expression, and Article 19(1)(g), which protects the right to practise any profession or carry on any occupation, trade or business.

She described this dual foundation as protection "from two different constitutional angles", but cautioned that the same structure also allows indirect pressures to operate.

"The most serious threats to press freedom are likely to arise not from direct censorship under Article 19(2), but from regulations justified under Article 19(6)," she said.

Ownership rules, licensing laws, advertising policies, taxation measures and increasingly even antitrust law can all be defended as economic regulation, she noted. Yet these measures may profoundly affect editorial independence while maintaining formal compliance with Article 19(1)(a).

"This allows the State to influence the press indirectly," she said, warning that constitutional vigilance is required to ensure regulation does not hollow out the core guarantees of free speech and professional freedom.

When speech and trade intersect, she argued, speech must prevail. Otherwise, legal freedom becomes illusory.

Editors, she suggested, may internalise the risk that critical coverage could result in the withdrawal of lucrative advertising contracts — particularly at a time when governments, public sector undertakings and political parties are competing in highly visible publicity campaigns through the press.

- "A press outlet may be legally free to criticise the government, yet economically constrained in ways that make such criticism costly or unsustainable," she said.

"The law may not silence the press; but it may shape the conditions under which speech is created," she said. Certain narratives may become safer, others riskier, well before editorial boards consciously debate publication decisions.

A free press, she stressed, cannot be manufactured through decree or centralised control. "It evolves through interaction between readers, writers and editors. Attempts to perfect it through centralised control, whether political or bureaucratic, undermine the very spontaneity that gives it vitality."

Justice Nagarathna also raised concerns about media ownership patterns. Even where outlets appear editorially independent on paper, their ability to pursue adversarial journalism may be curtailed by the economic or political interests of proprietors whose ties could be threatened by critical reporting.

"This raises a normative question: if press freedom depends on economic viability within competitive markets, can it truly be free?" she asked. A press that is free from the State may still be dependent on corporate power, which in turn may rely on State patronage.

She cautioned against what she termed the emergence of "selective journalism", saying restraints on free and frank reporting must be curbed at the earliest. Press freedom, she emphasised, is not merely a constitutional entitlement but also an ethical practice grounded in the twin ideals of objectivity and impartiality.

At the same time, she called on civil society to recognise independent reporting as a public good worth supporting. Good journalism, she said, does not run on goodwill alone.

"When someone takes a subscription, they are really saying this kind of reporting is worth backing," she observed. A press sustained by its readers is better placed to serve the public interest and fend off political pressures.

Former Supreme Court judge MB Lokur also addressed the gathering, praising the media's role in highlighting environmental issues. Such reporting, he said, raises public awareness and can create pressure that compels authorities to preserve and protect the environment.

The 2025 IPI-India Award was presented to Vaishnavi Rathore of Scroll.in for her reporting on the Great Nicobar Island development project. The award carries a cash prize of Rs 2 lakh, along with a trophy and citation.

In his welcome remarks, Vijay Joshi, Editor-in-Chief of Press Trust of India, reflected on journalism's institutional role. "There are moments when institutions speak loudly, and there are moments when they strictly stand firm. Journalism at its best does both. It asks difficult questions, not to obstruct progress, but to refine it," he said.

In a democracy as vibrant as India's, development is often described in superlatives — the biggest, the fastest, the largest. Journalism, however, employs a different vocabulary, Joshi added.

"It asks: at what cost is the development, for whom is this development, and who decides what to give?" —*PTI*

MIDDLE EAST BURNS AS US-ISRAEL BOMB IRAN

Missiles rain down on Israel; Trump says US casualities are possible in an operation 'planned for months'

WASHINGTON, TEL AVIV, TEHRAN, 28 FEB

Hours after US and Israeli strikes on Iranian targets, Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard announced it had launched a "first wave" of drones and missiles at Israel. There were no immediate reports of damage or casualties. In Israel, residents were instructed to remain close to bomb shelters. Streets were largely deserted as sirens sounded through much of Saturday morning. Major television networks shifted broadcasts to studios inside shelters.

Explosions were heard over Syria and Lebanon. Associated Press journalists in Damascus and Sidon reported blasts consistent with Israeli air defences intercepting incoming

Blasts echoed in Tehran, Iran after US and Israel joint military opperation, on Saturday—*INRA*

IRANIAN MISSILES. Iran maintains a self-imposed 2,000-kilometre limit on its ballistic missile range — placing the entire Middle East and parts of eastern Europe within reach. However, US President Donald Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu have insisted that Tehran was developing missilies that could strike the US.

DIPLOMATIC FALLOUT Pakistan's Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar condemned what he termed "unwarranted attacks" during a call with his Iranian counterpart Abbas Araghchi. The escalation comes despite weeks of US military build-up in the region and parallel diplomatic efforts. American and Iranian envoys had held talks in Switzerland and Oman seeking a negotiated settlement.

Oman's Foreign Minister Badr al-Busaidi, a key mediator, said "active and serious negotiations have yet again been undermined". He urged Washington not to deepen its involvement, warning that neither US interests nor global peace would be served.

Israel said the operation had been planned for months in coordination with the United States.

TRUMP'S JUSTIFICATION Trump, defending the action, claimed Iran continued to advance its nuclear programme despite earlier assertions that it had been "obliterated". He acknowledged potential American casualties, saying such losses "often happen in war".

In remarks that marked a departure from his "America First" pledge to avoid prolonged conflicts, Trump said he aimed to "annihilate" Iran's navy and dismantle Tehran-backed regional proxies. He urged the Revolutionary Guard to surrender, offering immunity, but warned of "certain death" if they refused. His statement also cited decades of hostility dating back to the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Trump also said that there could be US casualties in the war.

DOMESTIC PRESSURES Trump had previously held back military action amid Iran's crackdown on nationwide protests triggered by economic grievances. The Human Rights Activists News Agency says over 7,000 people were killed; Tehran acknowledges more than 3,000 deaths.

Iran insists it has not enriched uranium since June but has barred international inspectors from sites struck during a prior 12-day conflict. Satellite imagery suggests renewed activity at two facilities. Tehran maintains its right to enrich uranium and refuses to discuss its missile programme.

Analysts warn the crisis could roil global markets, particularly if Iran threatens shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, which accounted for a third of seaborne global oil exports in 2025.—*Agencies*

> **When we are finished, (Iranians) take over your government. It will be yours to take. This will probably be your only chance for generations. For years, you have asked for America's help, but you never got it**
>
> -Donald Trump, US President

> **Netanyahu and Trump's war on Iran is wholly unprovoked, illegal, and illegitimate. Trump has turned 'America First' into 'Israel First'—which always means 'America Last'. Our Powerful Armed Forces are prepared for this day and will teach the aggressors the lesson they deserve**
>
> -Abbas Araghchi, Iran Foreign Minister

> **Now that the Islamic Republic is collapsing... the final victory will be forged by our hands. It is we, the people of Iran, who will finish the job in this final battle. The time to return to the streets is near**
>
> -Reza Pahlavi, exiled crown prince

> **The peacekeeper (Trump) is at it again. The talks with Iran were just a cover. Everyone knew that. Who has more patience to wait for the enemy's sorry end now? The US is just 249 years old. The Persian Empire was founded over 2,500 years ago. Let's see what happens in 100 years**
>
> -Dmitry Medvedev, Russian Security Council Deputy Chairman

Iran strikes Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi, UAE Kuwait, Jordan

Smoke rises after Iranian ballistic missiles hit Bahrain's capital Manama on Saturday —*SCREENGRAB*

DUBAI, 28 FEB

Iran retaliated to the US and Iran's military strikes as it had promised; by launching a regional war. It targeted US military bases in the region and several Gulf countries.

Blasts were heard in Qatar's capital Doha throughout the day, and a man died in United Arab Emirates from shrapnel from a missile, at least two people were killed in Iraq while Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait and Jordan also reported attacks.

According to Iran's semi-official Fars news agency, Tehran attacked the Al-Udeid Air Base in Qatar, Al-Salem Air Base in Kuwait, Al-Dhafra Air Base in the UAE, The US Fifth Fleet base in Bahrain.

Saudi Arabia said in an announcement that Iran had targeted its capital and its eastern region in an attack that was repelled. It described the attacks as "blatant and cowardly" and said it reserved the right to respond, sentiments echoed by the other countries Iran attacked.

US embassies or consulates in Qatar, United Arab Emirates and Israel posted on social media that they told staffers to shelter in place and recommended all Americans "do the same until further notice."

A drone has targeted Kuwait International Airport, resulting in "minor injuries" to a number of employees, in addition to "limited material damage" to the passenger building, according to the Kuwait General Authority of Civil Aviation. —*Agencies*

UK's planes are in the sky, says Starmer

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer said on Saturday that "British planes are in the sky" to protect London and its ally's interests. Starmer condemned Iran's retaliatory strikes on Israel, calling them "indiscriminate", and described the Iranian regime as "utterly abhorrent" . UK did not participate in the US-Israel strikes, he said.

Leave Tehran now: Iran tells residents

Iran's National Security Council has advised residents to leave the capital Tehran. "You should, as far as possible and while maintaining calm, travel to other places and cities if you are able", the country's security body said in a statement. It said an essential supply of goods is being prepared.

Yemen's Houthis to attack ships in Red Sea

The Iranian-backed Houthis in Yemen have decided to resume missile and drone attacks on shipping routes and on Israel in support of Iran, two of the group's officials said. One of the officials said the rebels' first attack could come as soon as "tonight." The Houthis had stopped attacks after the October ceasefire in Gaza.

Airspace closure grounds flights globally

LONDON, 28 FEB

The US and Israel's attack on Iran disrupted flights across the region and beyond.

Several countries including the UAE, home to both the long-haul carriers Emirates and Etihad, Iraq and Israel closed their airspace on Saturday.

Qatar Airways Group said it has temporarily cancelled flights to and from Doha because Qatari airspace also was closed.

Planes that were en route to Israel were rerouted to other airports, and passengers who were at Ben Gurion International Airport awaiting flights were shuttled back.

Emirates said several of its flights were affected by the UAE airspace closure and urged passengers to check their flight status online. The carrier is based at Dubai International Airport, the busiest hub for international travel.

Dutch airline KLM had already announced earlier in the week that it was suspending flights to and from Tel Aviv starting on Sunday.

Virgin Atlantic cancelled its flight from Heathrow Airport in London to Dubai, meaning flights to and from India, the Maldives, Dubai and Riyadh could take slightly longer. The airline already was not flying over Iran.

Turkish Airlines said on X that flights to Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Iran and Jordan will be suspended until Monday and flights to Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, the UAE sand Oman would be suspended on Saturday.

The airline said additional cancellations may be announced.

Other airlines that cancelled flights to the region included Air France, British Airways, Iberia Express, Japan Airlines, LOT Airlines, Lufthansa, Norwegian AirAir Algerie, Scandavian Airlines, Wizz Air, Pegasus Airlines, ITA Airways. —*PTI*

Pak kills 300 Afghan fighters as war escalates

ISLAMABAD, 28 FEB

Pakistan authorities said that about 331 Afghan Taliban personnel and their allied terrorist groups have been killed so far as the war between the two neighbours showed little sign of deescalating.

Pakistan Information Minister Attaullah Tarar said on Saturday that another 500 Taliban personnel were injured, a day after Islamabad declared "open war" against Kabul.

Tarar said Pakistan forces completely destroyed 104 military posts, while they captured another 22 border posts during 'Operation Ghazab lil-Ha'.

Trucks carrying Afghan refugees near the Torkham crossing point, as border clashes continue between the two neighbours —*PTI*

Tarar said that 163 tanks, armoured vehicles have been destroyed, adding that Pakistan also hit 37 locations in the air strikes.

The conflict reerupted after Islamabad blamed the Taliban for a series of terrorist strikes across Pakistan and launched airstrikes across Afghanistan, claiming to target military infrastructure.

Afghanistan retaliated by simultaneously attacking 53 locations along the more than 2,600 km-long borders. Afghanistan also said it launched drone strike on several cities in Pakistan.

Islamabad has long accused the Afghan Taliban of allowing the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and other terrorist groups use their soil to conduct strikes against Pakistan. The Taliban rejects the allegations.

As tension mounted, the Afghan Taliban said it was willing to negotiate with Pakistan. Regional countries such as Iran, Saudi Arabia and China have offered to mediate. Turkey, which mediate peace talks during last year's border conflict, confirmed that it was in touch with both nations.

AFGHAN CAPTURE PAK PILOT?

Afghanistan claimed to shoot down a Pakistani jet in the city of Jalalbad and capture its pilot.

Wahidullah Mohammadi, spokesman for the military in eastern Afghanistan, said the Pakistani jet was downed by Afghan forces "and the pilot was captured alive", but Islamabad foreign ministry spokesman Tahir Hussain Andrab said that was "untrue", AFP reported.

—*Agencies*

Trump mulls 'friendly takeover of Cuba'

WASHINGTON/ HAVANA, 28 FEB

- The remarks come after Trump imposed an energy blockade on Cuba, crippling Havana's already weakened infastructure. Cuban soldiers recently shot at a US-registered speedboat, furtherescalating tensions

US President Donald Trump said on Friday that the US is in active negotiations with Cuba's government, floating the idea of a "friendly takeover of Cuba" without offering any details on what he meant.

Trump said that Secretary of State Marco Rubio was in discussions with Cuban leaders "at a very high level", adding that Cuba has "no money. They have no anything right now. But they're talking to us, and maybe we'll have a friendly takeover of Cuba."

Trump has imposed a fuel blockade on Cuba, heightening regional tensions after capturing Venezuelan leader Nicholas Maduro in January.

Tensions also reignited after Cuban soldiers opened fire on a Florida-registered speedboat that was allegedly carrying militants who opened fire. Four of the attackers were killed and six injured. —*PTI*

15 dead as cargo plane crashes near Bolivia's capital

LA PAZ, 28 FEB

A cargo plane carrying money crashed near Bolivia's capital, damaging around a dozen vehicles on a highway, scattering banknotes and causing at least 15 fatalities, an official said. Defence Minister Marcelo Salinas identified the aircraft as a Hercules C-130 transporting newly printed Bolivian currency, which "landed and veered off the runway" at El Alto airport, ending in a nearby field. Firefighters extinguished flames engulfing the aircraft. All flights to and from the airport were suspended. —*PTI*

US defends Pakistan's right to retaliate

The US supports Pakistan's right to defend itself Taliban's attacks US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Allison Hooker said, while expressing condolences for the loss of lives. President Trump said that he wouldn't intervene in the conflict, because he "gets along with Pakistan. He added that Pakistan has a "great Prime Minister (Shehbaz Sharif) and a great General (Field Marshal Asim Munir)".

OPENAI SEALS THE DEAL

Don't use Anthropic: Trump tells US govt

WASHINGTON, 28 FEB

The Trump administration on Friday ordered all US agencies to stop using Anthropic's. Hours after its rival was penalised, OpenAI CEO Sam Altman said it reached a deal to provide AI to classified military networks.

Anthropic said it wanted assurances from the US Department of Defence that its chatbot Claude wouldn't be used for mass surveillance or autonomous weapons. The Pentagon said it wouldn't use it that way but demanded unrestricted access.

In a statement issued on Friday evening, Anthropic said it would challenge what it called an unprecedented and legally unsound action "never before publicly applied to an American company."

US President Donald Trump, Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth and other officials took to social media to chastise Anthropic for not granting the military unrestricted access to its AI by Friday, accusing CEO Dario Amodei of risking national security.

Trump said Anthropic made a mistake trying to strong-arm the Pentagon. He wrote on Truth Social that most agencies must immediately stop using Anthropic's AI, but gave the Pentagon a six-month period to phase out the technology that is already embedded in military platforms.

"We don't need it, we don't want it, and will not do business with them again!" Trump stated.

Notably, Altman said that the same red lines that were the sticking point in Anthropic's dispute with the Pentagon are now enshrined in OpenAI's new partnership. He hopes the Pentagon will "offer these same terms to all AI companies". —*PTI*

Ex-mayor Balen launches campaign in Kathmandu

KATHMANDU, 28 FEB

Former rapper-turned-politician Balendra Shah, popularly known as Balen, has launched his election campaign in Kathmandu ahead of Nepal's general polls. Contesting from Jhapa-5 against former PM KP Sharma Oli, Balen drew large crowds during a roadshow led by the RSP. Balen, who resigned as Kathmandu mayor in January, has campaigned nationwide for the party, which won 21 seats in the dissolved House. He is being projected as the party's prime ministerial face for the 5 March polls. —*PTI*

GAIL invests Rs 1,736 cr in Maharashtra

NEW DELHI, 28 FEB

State-run gas utility GAIL (India) Ltd will invest Rs 1,736.25 crore to develop a 178.2 MW wind power project in Maharashtra as part of its drive towards net-zero carbon emissions by 2035. The board approved the investment on Friday. The project is expected to be completed within 24 months of the contract award and will expand its existing renewable portfolio of 117.95 MW of wind and 27 MW of solar capacity across several states in the country. GAIL aims to achieve net zero for Scope 1 and Scope 2 emissions by 2035 and Scope 3 by 2040, with plans to scale up renewable capacity to 3.4 GW by 2035 —*PTI*

IMFA acquires Tata Steel's Odisha ferro-chrome plant

BHUBANESWAR, 28 FEB

Indian Metals and Ferro Alloys Ltd (IMFA) has completed the acquisition of a ferro-chrome plant from Tata Steel Limited at Kalinganagar in Odisha's Jajpur district for Rs 707.26 crore. The deal includes a base price of Rs 610 crore, along with GST and net working capital adjustments, and has been fully funded through internal accruals. The 115-acre facility comprises four furnaces with an annual production capacity of one lakh tonnes. Capacity is expected to increase to 1.5 lakh tonnes per annum once a partially constructed fifth furnace is commissioned within a year. Managing director Subhrakant Panda described the acquisition as transformative, saying it strengthens IMFA's growth plans and positions it as India's largest ferro-chrome producer. —*PTI*

Zydus gets USFDA nod to market generic drugs

NEW DELHI, 28 FEB

Zydus Lifesciences on Saturday said it has received approval from the US health regulator to market generic anti-parasitic and leprosy medications. The company has received final approvals from the US Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) for Ivermectin Tablets (3 mg) and Dapsone Tablets (25 mg and 100 mg), the Ahmedabad-based drug said in a statement. Ivermectin tablets are prescription anti-parasitic medications primarily indicated for treating parasitic worm infections in humans, specifically intestinal strongyloidiasis and onchocerciasis. Dapsone tablets are indicated for the treatment of leprosy and dermatitis herpetiformis. It acts as an anti-infective and antibacterial agent and is used to control skin lesions in ifections like dermatitis herpetiformis and leprosy. —*PTI*

Air passenger traffic grows 4.36% in January

MUMBAI, 28 FEB

India's domestic air passenger traffic grew 4.36 per cent year-on-year to 152.49 lakh in January 2026 over the corresponding month of 2025, Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) said. The domestic carriers, including four major ones, IndiGo, Air India Group, SpiceJet and Akasa Air, together had flown a total of 146.11 lakh passengers in January 2025 on local routes. In terms of passenger load factor, Akasa Air recorded the highest seat factor at 93.2 per cent during January 2026, while IndiGo had the second-best at 87.7 per cent during the reporting month. IndiGo, which lost about 4 per cent market share in January this year wrested it back with 63.6 per cent market share—*PTI*

US-Iran war: 50% of India's oil supplies via Hormuz at risk

India imports 2.6 million barrels per day via Strait of Hormuz

NEW DELHI, 28 FEB

The United States and Israel's strike on Iranian targets has injected concerns for India's oil security, with chances of disruption of oil supply through the Strait of Hormuz rising.

Nearly half of the country's crude imports now pass through the narrow waterway that separates Iran from Oman and the UAE. Any disruption, even temporary, could ripple through India's economy via higher fuel costs, currency pressure and fiscal strain.

The Strait of Hormuz carries roughly one-fifth of global oil trade. Data from trade intelligence provider, Kpler showed that about 50 per cent of India's monthly oil imports transited the strait in January-February 2026, up from around 40 per cent in late 2025. India imports about 2.6 million barrels per day (bpd) through the route, primarily from Iraq, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Kuwait.

The vulnerability has increased partly because India reduced its dependence on discounted Russian crude in recent months due to pressure from the US. Crude prices have firmed by about 10 per cent since the US began positioning military assets in the region.

Any disruption in the Strait of Hormuz can hike fuel prices, currency pressure and fiscal strain in India ***PHOTO: PTI***

Equities brokerage firm, Equirus Securities estimated that if Iran's 3.3 million bpd of production is disrupted, prices could rise by 9-15 per cent, pushing crude from a base of $70 per barrel to roughly $76-81.

Even the possibility of partial disruption in Hormoz could embed a $20-40 per barrel geopolitical premium, reopening a pathway toward $95-110 per barrel.

India imports more than 85 per cent of its crude requirement, so any sustained rise in global oil prices significantly increases the import bill and widens the current account deficit.

Elevated oil costs also raise demand for dollars, which typically puts downward pressure on the rupee. The impact leads to domestic inflation. The government may have to cut fuel taxes or expand subsidies to limit the inflationary shock —*Agencies*

IndiGo, Air India suspend all flights to Middle East

NEW DELHI, 28 FEB

IndiGo and Air India on Saturday temporarily suspended their flights to and from the Middle East in view of the ongoing strike by US and Israel in Iran. The suspension is till midnight.

Services have been suspended to and from Dubai, Jeddah, Doha, Abu Dhabi, Dammam, Bahrain, Sharjah, Kuwait and Ras Al-Khaimah. The airline said these measures have been instituted as the safety and security of its customers and crew is the highest priority.

"Our teams are continuously monitoring the evolving situation and recalibrating operations to minimise disruption as much as possible," IndiGo said.

Meanwhile, Air India Express said that in view of the developing situation in parts of the Gulf region, it has suspended all west-bound international flights. "We continue to closely monitor the evolving situation and will proactively review and adjust our operations as necessary," the airline said in a statement.

Later, Air India, in a statement, said it has suspended all its Middel East-bound flights in view of the developing situation in the region. The airline further said it remains committed to maintaining the "highest standards" of safety for its passengers and crew. Earlier, Air India said its Delhi-Tel Aviv flight was returning to India due to the closure of Israeli airspace. The flight would land in Mumbai. The flight, operated with a Boeing 777 aircraft, was airborne for more than five hours, and the airline decided to return to Bengaluru, according to information available on the flight tracking website Flightradar24.com.

Flight operations to Gulf countries from Kerala airports were affected, with several airlines cancelling services. Passengers have been requested to check the status of their flights they had booked before arriving at the airport. —*PTI*

OUTBIDS NETFLIX

Paramount buys Warner Bros and Discovery for $110B

LOS ANGELES, 28 FEB

Paramount Skydance Corporation and Warner Bros. Discovery, Inc (WBD) have announced they have entered into a definitive merger agreement under which Paramount will acquire WBD.

A premier global media and entertainment company focused on expanding consumer choice and empowering creative talent worldwide would be formed.

The transaction has been unanimously approved by the Boards of Directors of both companies and is expected to close in Q3 2026, subject to customary closing conditions.

Paramount will acquire 100 per cent of WBD for USD 31 per share in cash, plus the "ticking fee", valuing WBD at USD 81 billion in equity value and USD 110 billion in enterprise value.

The merger unlocks innovative and compelling storytelling opportunities across the combined company's best-in-class film and television studios, streaming and linear platforms. Together, Paramount and WBD will deliver greater choice for consumers through its leading streaming platforms with an exceptional intellectual property portfolio that has produced popular franchises.

David Ellison, chairman and CEO of Paramount, a Skydance Corporation, said: "Our pursuit of Warner Bros. Discovery has been guided by a clear purpose: to honor the legacy of two iconic companies while accelerating our vision of building a next-generation media and entertainment company. ...."

David Zaslav, president and CEO of Warner Bros. Discovery said: "I'm very pleased with the outcome we achieved for WBD shareholders and the entertainment industry.....to secure a transaction that maximizes the value of our iconic assets and our century-old studio while delivering as much certainty as possible for our investors and customers." —*ANI*

CNN boss urges calm as Paramount buys parent firm

WASHINGTON, 28 FEB

Word had barely spread about Paramount's apparent victory in the competition to buy Warner Bros. Discovery before CNN chief Mark Thompson wrote to staff members. His message, in effect: Keep calm and carry on.

"Despite all the speculation you've read during this process, I'd suggest that you don't jump to conclusions until we know more," Thompson wrote in his internal memo, telling employees to focus on delivering journalism to their customers.

Warner Bros. Discovery CEO David Zaslav said in a company town hall on Friday that he recognized Paramount's win over Netflix "feels a little whiplashy," according to CNN's Brian Stelter. Zaslav predicted the deal would take six months to close. Paramount leader David Ellison has not commented on the developments or his plans for the network's future.

But in an already volatile media environment, the trepidation — if not the outcome itself — stands to be seismic.

Many at CNN had been fearing for their jobs even before this announcement. —*PTI*

OpenAI gets $110B funding from Amazon, SoftBank, Nvidia

NEW YORK, 28 FEB

OpenAI, the maker of ChatGPT, has secured USD 110 billion in new funding from Amazon, SoftBank and Nvidia, giving the artificial intelligence firm a pre-money valuation of USD 730 billion.

Chief executive and co-founder Sam Altman said Amazon is leading the investment with a total commitment of USD 50 billion. This includes an initial USD 15 billion, with a further USD 35 billion to follow under agreed conditions. Nvidia and SoftBank have each pledged USD 30 billion. Additional investors are expected to join as the funding round continues.

Altman said ChatGPT now has more than 900 million weekly active users and over 50 million consumer subscribers. He described the investment as marking a shift from frontier artificial intelligence research to large-scale everyday use, adding that leadership in the sector will depend on the ability to scale infrastructure rapidly and convert it into widely used products.

Under a multi-year partnership, Amazon Web Services (AWS) will become the exclusive third-party cloud distribution provider for OpenAI Frontier. The companies will expand their existing USD 38 billion agreement by a further USD 100 billion over eight years and develop customised AI models for Amazon developers. OpenAI said that its lpartnership with Microsoft remains unchanged. —*PTI*

AI a huge opportunity and risk for climate: UN body

NEW DELHI, 28 FEB

AI offers significant potential to combat the climate crisis but also poses environmental risks, a senior official of United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) warned.

Martin Krause, Director of the Climate Change Division at UNEP, told that AI can greatly aid early weather warnings, renewable grid integration, and satellite alerts for emissions, but its high energy and water demands could worsen environmental challenges if unmanaged.

He said that AI helps predict floods and storms more accurately and assists in balancing renewable energy grids.

Krause stressed the importance of integrating renewable energy into data centres to prevent increased greenhouse gases, emphasising the need for site-specific assessments. "There must be guardrails to ensure AI benefits do not deplete scarce natural resources," he said. —ANI

Modi inaugurates semiconductor plant in Gujarat

SANAND, 28 FEB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday inaugurated Micron Technology's semiconductor plant at Sanand in Gujarat, and said the country is "firmly establishing its identity" in the hardware sector.

The inauguration of the US-based company's ATMP (assembly, testing, marking and packaging) plant, the first in the country, reflects a deep partnership between India and the United States, he said. The message has reached the world loud and clear: India is capable, India is competitive and India is committed, Modi said.

"India, long known for its software strength, is now firmly establishing its identity in the hardware sector as well," the Prime Minister said. "Microchips will be the regulator of this century," he said. —*PTI*

NSE shares won't list on NSE; IPO to be Offer for Sale

NEW DELHI, 28 FEB

The National Stock Exchange (NSE) will not list its shares on its own platform when it goes public, due to Indian regulations prohibiting self-listing, said CEO Ashish Chauhan. Instead, the IPO will be structured as an Offer for Sale (OFS), with existing shareholders selling shares. The proceeds will go directly to shareholders, not the company.

Chauhan explained that the NSE needs to list on an alternative exchange, like BSE, and that the IPO will enhance transparency and governance, strengthening market discipline. He said, "Any public utility, which the NSE is, should be listed, whether it is an electricity utility, a stock market utility or any other utility."

Chauhan also revealed the NSE's plans to diversify into new segments such as electricity futures, a coal spot exchange, and metals, leveraging its expertise in managing high-volume markets. He stated that the exchange's experience in automation and risk mitigation will help develop these sectors, aiming to improve price discovery and transparency. —*PTI*

REDUCE CHINESE IMPORTS

Andhra to open coastline for rare earth mining

AMRAVATI, 28 FEB

Andhra Pradesh plans to open up its mineral-rich coastline for large-scale rare earth and titanium-bearing beach sand mining, in a move to reduce India's dependence on Chinese imports.

State-run miner Andhra Pradesh Mineral Development Corporation (APMDC) has identified multiple heavy mineral-bearing deposits across coastal districts.

The state holds nearly 25 per cent of India's beach sand mineral resources - the second highest in the country - with significant deposits of ilmenite, rutile, zircon and monazite, the latter a key source of rare earth elements used in magnets for electric vehicles, wind turbines, electronics and defence systems.

Beach sand minerals are critical inputs for industries ranging from paints and aerospace to nuclear energy and electric mobility.

The move comes amid rising concerns over China's dominance in critical mineral supply chains. China controls over half of global titanium mineral production and more than 90 per cent of rare earth processing capacity.

India imports more than 75 per cent of its titanium dioxide pigment requirements, with a large share sourced from China, despite possessing substantial titanium mineral reserves.

Demand for rare earth permanent magnets in India is projected to grow at over 15 per cent annually. APMDC has secured approvals for 10 major beach sand deposits across coastal districts, including Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Visakhapatnam, Kakinada and Krishna. —*PTI*

IIM Mumbai students offered top package at Rs 71.4 LPA

MUMBAI, 28 FEB

The Indian Institute of Management Mumbai announced impressive placement results for its 2024-2026 batch, with the highest domestic salary reaching Rs 71.4 lakh per annum.

The top 10 percentile secured an average package of Rs 47.5 lakh, the top 20 percentile Rs 41.4 lakh, and the top 50 percentile Rs 34.5 lakh, indicating strong recruiter demand beyond peak salaries.

Graduates found roles across diverse sectors including Banking, Financial Services and Insurance (BFSI), Consulting, FMCG, General Management, IT, Manufacturing, Operations, Logistics, Pharma, Healthcare,

Product Management, and Sales and Marketing. Consulting remained the leading recruiting domain with 123 offers, while BFSI increased hiring by 33 per cent year-on-year, marking the season's strongest sectoral growth.

FMCG hiring grew by 24 per cent, and Logistics also saw significant expansion, reaffirming the institute's expertise in supply chain and operational strategy. —*PTI*

J&K tower over K'taka to clinch maiden Ranji Trophy

Karnataka failed to take a single wicket on the 5th day

HUBBALLI, 28 FEB

Jammu and Kashmir scripted an extraordinary tale of resilience in Indian domestic cricket to claim their maiden Ranji Trophy title by out-batting traditional heavyweights Karnataka here on Saturday, capping a glorious season that saw them tackle favourites and fellow upstarts with equal tact and confidence.

The bald facts will tell that Jammu and Kashmir held the eight-time former champions to a draw, punctuated by a 291-run first innings lead to lock the crown, an advantage they extended to 633 runs after scoring 342/4 in their second innings on the fifth and final day here.Opener Qamran Iqbal's second first-class hundred (160 not out) and Sahil Lotra's maiden first-class ton (101 not out) added sheen to the historical occasion.

But the day was always meant to be more than just cold numbers; it was meant to tell the story of determination and the power of a dream that was more than six decades in the making. It was 67 years ago when Jammu and Kashmir made their debut in India's premier domestic competition, which is now 92 years old.In the past, J&K had entered the quarterfinals in 2013-14, 2019-20 and 2024-25 seasons but succumbed to a train of cataclysmic events and their own frayed nerves.

But over the last five days here at the KSCA Stadium, they hardly resembled first-time final entrants, outmanoeuvring a side brimming with India stars with consummate ease. That Karnataka failed to take a single wicket on the fifth day after J&K resumed from overnight 186 for four will reinforce the dominance of the tourists in the final.

Jammu and Kashmir's captain Paras Dogra and others celebrate with the tournament trophy after winning the Ranji Trophy 2025-26 final cricket match against Karnataka, at KSCA Stadium, in Hubballi -PTI

Nabi bowled exceptionally well: Padikkal

Karnataka captain Devdutt Padikkal on Saturday lavished praise on Jammu and Kashmir pacer Auqib Nabi for bowling "exceptionally well" throughout the Ranji Trophy season, while conceding that his side failed to step up in the final, which they lost here.

In what turned out to be a one-way traffic in the summit clash of the 91st Ranji Trophy, a persistent and perseverant J&K lifted the trophy for the first-time in their maiden appearance on the basis.

They won based on the first-innings lead, after the final ended in a draw on the fifth and final day.

Nabi was one of the architects of J&K's historic campaign, claiming 60 wickets overall, including 5/54 in the final to help his side take a massive lead of 291 runs in the first innings.

We always understood the toss would play a big role, but at the end of the day, it's a final, you know, the pressures of the final will be there regardless of what you do. —*PTI*

Omar Abdullah announces ₹ 2 crore cash reward

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Saturday announced a cash reward of Rs 2 crore for the Jammu and Kashmir cricket team following its maiden Ranji Trophy triumph. Calling it a watershed moment for Jammu and Kashmir cricket, he said, the landmark win has filled the entire region with pride and inspiration. In a post on X, Abdullah announced a cash reward of 2 crore for the players and support staff after their "emphatic" victory over Karnataka on their home turf.

SALMAN AGHA SET TO LOSE PAKISTAN CAPTAINCY

KARACHI, 28 FEB

Salman Ali Agha is set to be removed as captain of the Pakistan team regardless of the outcome of their campaign in the ongoing T20 World Cup, while some other senior players might have also played their last tournament for the national side.

According to a reliable source at the Pakistan Cricket Board, chairman Mohsin Naqvi is "unhappy" with the way the team's campaign has turned out at the mega event.

"Naqvi is not happy at all because this time he was assured by the selectors, team management, and his close aides on the board that the team was set to do well in the World Cup," the source said on Saturday.

He said Naqvi had made up his mind to sack Salman as the T20 captain and would also have a candid discussion with head coach Mike Hesson and the selectors about the future of some players.

"Salman, Babar Azam, Usman Khan, and a few others will probably see curtains on their T20 international career after the World Cup," the source said.

The names of Shadab Khan and Shaheen Shah Afridi are being considered to replace Salman as captain.

He also narrated how Hesson had even before the World Cup told Naqvi that after the event, Pakistan needed to bring in and establish some younger players and move ahead with the requirements of modern-day T20 cricket. —*PTI*

T20 WORLD CUP 2026

-PTI

Zimbabwe look to end campaign on high against SA

NEW DELHI, 28 FEB

Zimbabwe will need to fix their bowling woes against a skillful South Africa as they aim to end their spirited T20 World Cup campaign on a high in their final Super 8s fixture here on Sunday.

Reaching the Super 8s as group toppers was part of the success story for Zimbabwe, and inspired by their leader Sikandar Raza, they would be determined to push South Africa to the limit.

South Africa is the team to beat in the ICC showpiece, and if Zimbabwe is to challenge them, they will have to come up with a better bowling performance after conceding more than 250 runs in the previous two Super 8s games against West Indies and India.

Raza knows they can only compete with the bigger teams if they do well in all three departments.

The top-three comprising skipper Aiden Markram, Quinton de Kock, and Ryan Rickelton, too, are at the top of their game, and it would take a special bowling effort from Raza and his team to stop them. On the batting front, the opening duo of Brian Bennett and Tadiwanashe Marumani needs to maximise the power play. Bennett, who is yet to be dismissed in the tournament, showed against India that he can also hit sixes. He would need to find a way to clear the stands against a wily South African attack.

Aiden Markram -PTI

Marco Jansen and Ngidi (11 wickets each) have been the standout bowlers for the Proteas and are complemented well by pace spearhead Kagiso Rabada, Corbin Bosch, and frontline spinner Keshav Maharaj.

The match starts at 3 PM IST. —*PTI*

-PTI

Pakistan's Sahibzada creates a world record

QATAR, 28 FEB

Pakistan's Sahibzada Farhan became the first batter to score two hundreds in a single edition of the men's T20 World Cup, during a Super Eight match against Sri Lanka in Pallekele on Saturday. Farhan had earlier scored a ton against Namibia during a group stage match in the T20 World Cup 2026. The 29-year-old got to his hundred against Sri Lanka, off the 59th delivery he had faced in the day, with a single to long off against Dasun Shanaka. Farhan's century put Pakistan in control of the game, which will determine its future in the tournament.Earlier in the day, he had become the highest scorer in a single edition of a T20 World Cup, breaking the record held by India's Virat Kohli.—*PTI*

ICC is working on alternate flight plans for players

DUBAI, 28 FEB

The International Cricket Council (ICC) is working on alternate flight plans for players and officials returning from the T20 World Cup after the US strikes on Iran. The US and Israel launched a major offensive on Iran on Saturday, with President Donald Trump calling on the Iranian public to "seize control of your destiny" and overthrow the Islamic leadership that has ruled the nation since 1979. "The International Cricket Council (ICC) is closely monitoring the evolving situation in the Middle East and has activated comprehensive contingency plans to safeguard the travel, logistics, and well-being of all stakeholders associated with the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026, currently underway in India and Sri Lanka," the ICC said in a statement on Saturday.—*PTI*

India seeks redemption against dominant Australia in 3rd ODI

HOBART, 28 FEB

Outclassed in the first two ODIs, a struggling India will need to address their batting frailties to salvage some pride when they face a dominant Australia in the third and final women's ODI here on Sunday.

World champions India have failed to post competitive totals in both matches, allowing Australia to cruise to victory with little resistance.

In the opening game, India slumped to three wickets down inside the powerplay and never quite recovered. Though the visitors corrected that in the second ODI with a 78-run opening stand, the middle and lower order failed to capitalise. India lost five wickets for just 52 runs between the 17th and 31st overs, an area they need to address. India were bowled out for 214 in the first ODI and managed a below-par 251 for nine in the second, totals that Australia chased down comfortably to maintain their record of winning all bilateral ODI series against India. Match starts: 9.20 am IST. —*PTI*

-PTI

BATTING BOOM LIFTS INDIA

-PTI

Bowling questions linger ahead of virtual quarters against WI

KOLKATA, 28 FEB

Their batting has finally burst into life, but cracks remain in India's bowling armour as they take on an explosive West Indies in a virtual quarterfinal of the T20 World Cup, here on Sunday.

West Indies' defeat to South Africa and India's emphatic win over Zimbabwe have turned this Group 1 Super Eights clash into a do-or-die contest, making it a high-stakes battle at the Eden Gardens.

The winner will get a place in the second semifinal against England on March 5 in Mumbai. India's batting revival against Zimbabwe was just perfect and long-awaited. In a rejigged line-up, with Sanju Samson returning to the top, all the top six contributed in unison. Making a comeback, Sanju scored only 24, but he deserves credit for lifting the tempo early and giving India a flying start.

That aggressive approach settled the nerves of Abhishek Sharma, whose previous best in an uncharacteristically lean tournament had been 15 following a hat-trick of ducks.

The star opener responded in style with a half-century, while Tilak Varma flourished in his new No.6 role, batting with renewed intent in his 16-ball 44 not out.

India ticked all the boxes with the bat, posting 256/4 -- the highest total of this T20 World Cup -- but that does not mean they arrive at Eden Gardens without concerns.

While left-arm pacer Arshdeep Singh was India's pick with a triple strike against Zimbabwe and Jasprit Bumrah and Hardik Pandya have been clinical, it is spin ace Varun Chakravarthy who has looked a shadow of his past. The mystery spinner has failed to get his length right and appears guilty of experimenting too much.

His growing ineffectiveness hurt India badly against South Africa. The match starts at 7 PM IST —*PTI*

-PTI

PRAGUE MASTERS: GUKESH SUFFERS A SHOCK DEFEAT

PRAGUE, 28 FEB

World Champion D Gukesh suffered a shock defeat to Jorden van Foreest of Holland, while Aravindh Chithambaram played out a draw with Parham Maghsoodloo of Iran in the third round of the Masters section of the Prague International chess festival here.

Still looking for his first victory in the tournament, Gukesh never really found his footing against van Foreest, who, playing white, employed the Ruy Lopez and seized the initiative early with the bishop pair in the Tartakower variation.

The Indian soon came under heavy pressure and had to part with a pawn. The technicalities remained, but Foreest could do no wrong in this round.

-PTI

The trade of Queens led to a pawn-less rook and minor piece endgame for Gukesh, wherein the Dutchman cleaned up the king side, and his pawns did the remaining. The game lasted 48 moves.

Foreest regained the joint lead and is the only player in the event with all three decisive games.

With two points in his kitty, Foreest shares the lead with the Uzbek duo of Nodirbek Yakubboev and Nodirbek Abdusattorov, along with local favourite David Navara.

With six rounds remaining in the 10-player 9-round tournament, Gukesh shares the seventh spot with top seed Vincent Keymer of Germany, Hans Moke Niemann of the United States, and Maghsoodloo, all having one point from their three games.

The other Indian in the fray, Aravindh, played out a draw with Maghsoodloo to take his tally to 1.5 points, along with David Anton Guijarro of Spain.

Aravindh could not really get going with his white pieces against Maghsoodloo after going for a strange variation against the Caro-Kann defense. —*PTI*

ASIAN BOXING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Lovlina, Nikhat to lead 20-member Indian squad

NEW DELHI, 28 FEB

Olympic medallist Lovlina Borgohain and two-time world champion Nikhat Zareen will spearhead the 20-member Indian contingent at the Asian Boxing Championships in Mongolia from March 28-April 11.

The 20-member squad was finalised after an intensive month-long evaluation process, with players inducted into the ongoing national camp in Patiala following the National Championships in January.

As per the selection policy, finalists at the Asian Boxing Championships in the approved weight categories for the Commonwealth Games and Asian Games will be selected as direct entries for the respective multi-sport contingents.

The continental championship, therefore, carries added significance as both a medal opportunity and a key qualification pathway for the upcoming multi-sport events.

Lovlina (75kg), who recently struck gold at the Boxam Elite Championship in Spain, will headline the women's squad alongside Preeti (54kg), Arundhati Choudhary (70kg), and Priya (60kg), all of whom also won gold in Spain and have shown consistent form.

They will be joined by reigning world champions Minakshi (48kg) and Jaismine (57kg).

The remaining categories include World Boxing Cup Final gold medallist Nikhat Zareen (51kg), Ankushita Boro (65kg), Pooja Rani (80kg), and Alfiya Tarannum Akram Khan Pathan (80+kg), completing a well-rounded squad that blends experience with emerging talent.

In the men's category, World Boxing Cup Final and Boxam Championship gold medallist Sachin (60kg) leads the contingent. —*PTI*

Desist from using India or Indian in name or activities

NEW DELHI, 28 FEB

The Sports Ministry has directed the Differently Abled Cricket Council of India (DCCI) to refrain from using 'India' or 'Indian' in its name or activities, as it is not a recognised national federation.

In a letter to DCCI secretary Ravi Kant Chauhan, the ministry said the use of 'India' or 'Indian' is only permitted for bodies that have been recognised by the government. Similar letters have also been sent to the Women's Football Federation of India and the Indian Body Builders' Federation, among others."... It has come to the notice of this Department that the expression "India" is being used by your Federation, namely, Differently-Abled Cricket Council of India, even though the said Federation is not recognised as a National Sports Federation by this Ministry," the letter stated. —*PTI*